



'Are they going
to hang me?'

Exclusive interview
with Boutros Ghali p.7

Police raids

In a shoot-out yesterday, police shot and killed Qasim Abdel-Hamid, a leading member of Al-Sha'abiyyoun, a militant Islamist group, and arrested 13 of his aides. Shooting began between police and the militants after security forces raided their hideout in El-Marg, in northeast Cairo.

Security sources said that Abdel-Hamid was evading three prison sentences totalling 45 years. He was convicted of the murder of four policemen in 1993 and of armed robbery in the same year. The sources added that an Israeli Uzi sub-machine gun was found on his person.

According to the police, the group was planning a series of assassinations against public figures including police officers, artists and journalists. They also had plans to rob a number of jewellery stores, police said.

In related developments, police also rounded up 33 suspected members of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya in various raids on the militants' hideouts throughout eight governorates. However, four of the wanted suspects evaded capture, police sources said.

PNA protest

Turkey has handed over to Israeli authorities three Palestinians from Gaza who were trying to board a flight from Turkey to Israel using false British passports. Tarek Hassan reports from Gaza.

Palestinian Minister of Justice Fadi Abu Medin told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Palestinian National Authority was in the process of filing an official protest to the Turkish authorities. He said that the PNA would ask the Israelis to hand the three men over to it.

Hassan Asfour, a Palestinian foreign affairs official, told the *Weekly* that Turkey had violated international law, since Palestinians living in the self-rule area fall under the jurisdiction of the PNA. According to Palestinian officials, this incident reveals secret clauses in the recently concluded Turkish-Israeli military agreement.

Press boycott

PALESTINIAN journalists boycotted the opening of a legislative council meeting in Gaza yesterday to protest police brutality and harassment against reporters and photographers. The journalists held a two-hour sit-down protest outside the legislative council building where Palestinian President Yasser Arafat was expected to announce the portfolios of his new cabinet.

The action was organised after police detained a Palestinian photographer last week because they considered that a picture he had taken of children washing a donkey on a Gaza beach was disrespectful to Palestinians. Twenty-five Palestinian journalists have reportedly been held or harassed by the police over the past two years.

Arms ban plea

A US-BASED human rights group yesterday called on Washington to stop supplying weapons and artillery to Israel until its government pledged not to target civilians in Lebanon. Human Rights Watch urged the US government to seek public and written assurances from Israel that US-supplied or designed weapons would not be used indiscriminately in civilian areas in Lebanon.

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Peres' close call

As Peres and Netanyahu exchange images, Arabs can expect little good from the Israeli poll, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

Whatever the hype surrounding Israel's 14th Knesset elections, two factors have become self-evident in the run-up to polling day. First, in terms of reaching a comprehensive peace with most of the Arab world, the vote on 29 May is probably the most critical in Israel's 48-year history. Second, the current electoral fight between Israel's two main parties, Labour and Likud, is the dullest in living memory.

One reason for this is the new system devised for the elections. On election day, Israelis will participate for the first time in two ballots, one for the 120-member Knesset, or parliament, and one for the prime minister. The change was introduced in 1995 with the blessing of the then premier, Yitzhak Rabin, who viewed it as a means of strengthening the position of prime minister by limiting the disproportionate influence historically wielded by Israel's smaller, and especially religious, parties in the Knesset. But the result has been a sharp contraction in genuine political choice for Israel's nearly four million strong electorate. And this narrowing of debate has one simple cause — the polls.

Most Israeli commentators now view the outcome of the vote, especially in the prime ministerial contest between Peres and Netanyahu, as too close to call. Official Gallup surveys give Peres a steady four to five per cent lead over Netanyahu, but "internal polls" conducted privately by Labour and Likud are more cautious. Labour's polls has Peres with a mere one to two point lead, while a Likud poll cited on 21 May had their man nosing ahead. All polls show the number of undecided or floating voters hovering stubbornly at between 10 to 15 per cent of the electorate. "With the gap so narrow," conceded Netanyahu on 21 May, "the shift of a few hundred votes could be enough to decide Israel's next prime minister."

The upshot is a dash by the two main parties to the cen-

tre of Israeli politics, keeping programmatic differences between them to a minimum for fear of alienating the floating vote. On the campaign trail, Peres thus speaks like Likud, pledging "a strong Israel with Peres" (the official Labour election slogan), reassuring all that a government led by him would keep "Jerusalem united under Israeli sovereignty" and vowing that "no Jewish settlement will be dismantled" in any final status deal with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, wears the unusual plumage of a dove ("peace with security") is the Likud campaign slogan, accepting the Oslo accords and insisting that a Likud government would "negotiate a final status agreement" with the Palestinians "on its undertakings". The result, says Israeli political analyst Tanya Reinhart, is an electoral contest that is less a "political struggle between ideologies" than "an imaginary battle between two different ways of implementing the same ideology".

This is bad news for Israeli democracy. But it is even worse news for the peace process, particularly its Palestinian track, since any pull to the centre on the part of Peres means a turn to a hardline position on matters such as Jerusalem and the settlements.

Israel's floating vote is made up of three main constituencies — young first-time voters, Israel's Jewish orthodox or religious parties and the 600,000 or so Russian immigrants (over half of whom are now of voting age) from the ex-Soviet Union who have settled in Israel since 1989. And none is in Peres' pocket.

Labour is investing a lot of its campaign publicity in Israel's new voter generation, drawn to Peres' idealism in the wake of Rabin's assassination but less sure of it now in the aftermath of Islamist suicide attacks inside Israel proper. Since they are an unknown quantity — and with

the prayer that there are no further attacks before polling day — Labour activists believe they can be woo back. They are less sanguine about the religious constituency.

There are two main religious parties in Israeli politics: Shas, an orthodox movement made up of Sephardi or non-European Jews, and United Torah Judaism (UTJ), the traditional Ashkenazi or European orthodox list. Together they had 10 seats in the old Knesset and are expected to win the same in the new. Given that Labour's former coalition partner, the leftist Meretz bloc, is expected to do badly in the elections, Peres is desperate to woo the orthodox parties to forestall a Likud-led coalition dominating the next Knesset. But the orthodox are playing hard to get.

Neither Shas nor UTJ are likely to openly endorse Peres or Netanyahu for prime minister. But analysts conclude that a free vote granted to their followers means a vote for Netanyahu, since Shas and UTJ are rightist on social policies as much as they are conservative on religious issues. Peres, therefore, wants them to call on their followers to abstain in the prime ministerial vote. In return, Peres is promising to maintain the religious status quo in Israel, granting only orthodox Rabbis the right of conversion and offering more powers to municipalities controlled by either Shas or UTJ.

Such gifts have so far had little effect. A poll carried out on 8 May among Shas and UTJ supporters found that 63 per cent would vote for Netanyahu as prime minister, a miserly six per cent for Peres.

More ominously (at least as far as Palestinians are concerned), Labour, in its search for coalition partners, is flirting with the National Religious Party (NRP), an ultra-nationalist movement with considerable support among the 140,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. Reports emerged last week of a meeting between

Labour cabinet minister, Yossi Beilin, and the NRP's Rabbi Yoel Ben Nun, a settler leader in the West Bank settlement of Ofra.

In return for supporting Peres, Beilin promised Ben Nun that no Jewish settlement would be uprooted in any final status deal with the Palestinians and that all settlements would stay under Israeli control. The Labour/NRP agreement has yet to be made public because, say sources, the NRP, too, is playing hard to get.

Such overtures have alarmed Israel's Palestinian minority and enraged Labour's erstwhile allies in Meretz. "Any coalition" with parties like the NRP or Shas "will take us back to the bad old days of no peace... and blindness to social problems. Israel will change unrecognisably for the worse," railed Meretz leader, Yossi Sarid, on news of the putative Labour/NRP pact. But it is a mark of Peres' desperation that he is prepared to countenance such alignments.

Last February, Peres and Labour commanded a 15 to 20 per cent lead over Likud. The Israeli leader then decided to bring Israel's election day up from November to May, kill Yehuda Ayash in Gaza and launch a wholly inept war against Lebanon. The cumulative result of these errors was the rescue of Netanyahu from oblivion, since most Israelis figure that if they are to have Likud policies, they may as well have a Likud government.

Labour supporters, meanwhile, are starting to worry about the Peres factor. Three times Peres has led a Labour coalition against Likud in Israeli elections, and each time he has lost. As Israel approaches what Netanyahu has described as the "most fateful elections in its history", increasing numbers of Israelis, Palestinians and Arabs are beginning to see in Peres less the architect of peace or visionary of a new Middle East, but — and entirely through his own doing — a fourth-time loser.

(see Pre-election questions, p.4)



photo: Saleh Ibrahim

A star is born

TWO THOUSAND spectators and millions of TV viewers were due to witness a crucial clash between two world squash champions, senior champion Jansher Khan of Pakistan, and Egypt's own world junior champion, Ahmed Barada on Wednesday night, writes Ilias Mazhar.

The match, the final of the first Al-Ahram International Squash Championship at the Giza Plateau, was viewed as an encounter between the experience of the 26-year-old world champion, and the youth and zeal of his 19-year-old rival.

Playing on home ground always helps, and Barada had all of Egypt behind him, including President Hosni Mubarak, an avid squash player himself. The president phoned Barada before the semi-final match to wish him luck and tell him he would be watching on TV.

Egypt's favourite son delighted his fans and surprised the world by defeating a series of highly-ranked players to reach the final of this \$100,000 event. He beat Australia's Rodney Eyles, ranked 2, in the quarter-finals and overpowered England's Chris Walker, ranked 7, in a thrilling and powerful semi-final on Tuesday. Khan beat Scotland's fourth ranked Peter Nicol in the semi-finals.

The final was played last night, after *Al-Ahram Weekly* had gone to press. But regardless of the result, Barada's stardom is assured, played out with the pyramids as backdrop. (see p.15)

Supreme Court rules out veil

In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Constitutional Court upheld a ministerial decree banning *niqab* from schools, elaborating that *hijab* was not an Islamic obligation. Dina Ezzat reports

After a two-year legal battle, Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeeddin has won full judicial support for his decree forbidding school girls from wearing *niqab* (head-to-toe veil that completely covers the face and sometimes leaves only two peep-holes or a slit over the eyes) to school.

He believes the *niqab* causes many problems for the girls who wear it. "Psychologists have repeatedly affirmed that it causes girls at this young age severe problems," Bahaeeddin said.

The ministerial decree also banned the wearing of *hijab* (headcover which leaves the face revealed) by primary school girls "whose young age exempts them from taking the veil" and required parental approval for preparatory and secondary school girls to wear the *hijab* to school "to avoid having parents complaining that teachers coerced their students to take the veil."

The court said that "Personal freedom [of individuals] does not deny the legislature the prerogative to order a unified dress code for certain groups of people in certain places [of work or study]. It also stated that while Islam enjoins modesty from women it does not strictly define their dress code."

"This also applies to the *hijab*," Adel Sherif, counsellor to the Supreme Constitutional Court told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "We do not believe that there is a text that strictly requires Muslim women to take the *hijab*. It is all a matter of different interpretations of the text," he added.

This court verdict is binding and cannot be appealed against.

However, lawyer Abdel-Halim Ramadhan, who defended the right of some girls to wear the *niqab* to school, said that he will file a new lawsuit. "I will bring up a point that was not mentioned in the verdict of the Supreme Constitutional Court," he said. Ramadhan's point is that since there is no text in the constitution or in Islamic *shari'a* that bars Muslim women from wearing the *niqab* then nobody has an administrative right to violate this principle.

Sherif, however, believes that Ramadhan's case will not have a leg to stand on. "The verdict was comprehensive," he said.

Minister Bahaeeddin praised the decree of the Supreme Constitutional Court. He told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that it supported his view that *niqab* is not an Islamic dress.

Over the last two years, teachers trying to enforce Bahaeeddin's decree have become involved in bitter confrontations with parents who insisted that their daughters maintained the *niqab*. At least two headmistresses have received threats from fanatical parents.

The legal battle over Bahaeeddin's decree was launched in August 1994 when a number of parents contested the *niqab* prohibition before administrative courts. Some won and others lost. Those who lost had their case referred to the Supreme Constitutional Court.

A number of head-to-toe veiled girls interviewed by the *Weekly* following the court order said that they were not going to abandon their *niqab* because they believed that is the right dress for Muslim women.

However, Islamic scholar Mohamed Emara said that "the only outfit that Muslim women are required by *shari'a* to wear is the *hijab*. The *niqab* however is an old tradition that has nothing to do with *shari'a*".

Bahaeeddin said that his battle over the *niqab* is part of his overall campaign to uproot fanaticism from schools. "There have been incidents where in-school or out-of-school elements coerced girls into taking the *niqab*. We are not going to tolerate this terrorist intimidation," he said.

The minister of education also prohibited all school teachers from preaching fanatical ideas. He also made sure that all school libraries were "completely cleansed of all books that promote the terrorists' ideas" which encourage Muslims to be violent to their Coptic schoolmates.

He pledged that he will instruct school inspectors to continuously monitor schools' adherence to the ruling, especially in areas where fanaticism is prevalent.

"It is my duty to see that these girls do not fall victim to the calls of fanaticism and terrorism," Bahaeeddin said.

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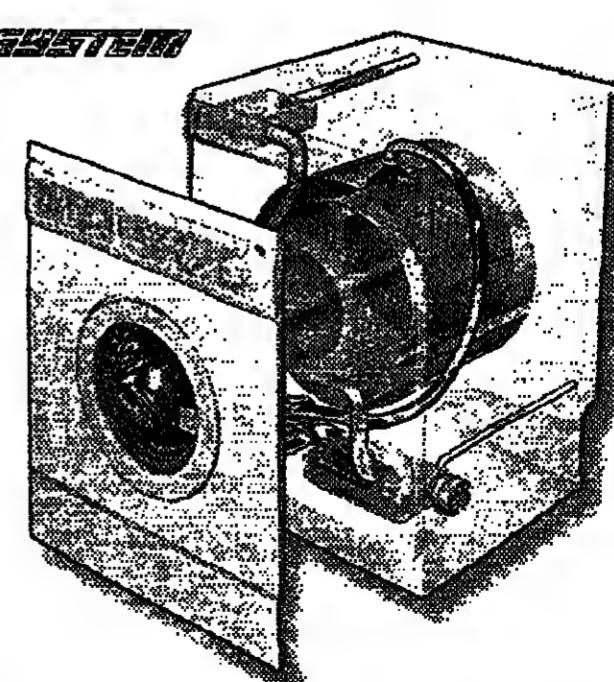
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Journalists insist on a better deal

While acknowledging the 'positive' features of a hard-negotiated draft of a new press law, a meeting of the general assembly of the Press Syndicate resolved to fight on for a better deal. **Shaden Shehata** reports

At a general assembly of the Press Syndicate on Tuesday, journalists rejected a draft for a new press law to replace the controversial Law 93, introduced last May and viewed by many journalists as placing unacceptable restrictions on the freedom of the press.

In the assembly, the seventh since the law was passed, journalists insisted that their previously demanded modifications and additions be included in the draft. They also agreed to a sit-in at the syndicate to protest the draft, and the formation of a committee of senior journalists to project the journalists' case in the international arena. Meanwhile, Press Syndicate chairman Ibrahim Nafie remained hopeful that an acceptable solution would be found to end the year-long dispute.

The General Assembly was debating the latest version of a draft law prepared by a committee of the Shura Council, the most recent stage of work which has been on-going since President Hosni Mubarak intervened in an attempt to resolve the government-journalists' stand-off, soon after the original law was passed.

A first version of the draft was prepared by a semi-governmental committee including journalists and legal experts. This committee finished its work in March. In an extraordinary general assembly, journalists demanded certain amendments to the draft as a precondition to the syndicate's approval. The draft, together with the suggested amendments were submitted to Mubarak, who in turn passed them on to the Shura Council committee. That committee finished its work on Monday, and the new draft will be debated by the Shura Council as a whole before being returned to Mubarak. He will then submit it to the People's Assembly for final enactment.

The new draft cancels all the provisions of Law 93, with the exception of Article Two, considered

by journalists as one of the most important. Article Two consists of 12 items covering various publication offences and imposing stiff penalties. Contrary to journalists' demands, those penalties still include imprisonment under the draft, although the severity of sentences is reduced. Unlike libel law in many countries, Article Two's libel clause leaves the onus on the journalist to prove the authenticity of his information, rather than making the plaintiff prove the information is false.

However, journalists had to acknowledge that the new draft was, in some senses, a positive step. The draft reverses a provision of Law 93 allowing journalists to be held in protective custody while under investigation for a publication offence, with one exception — a suspected violation of Article 179 of the Penal Code, which deals with insulting or defaming the president of the republic. In addition, judges are given the option of punishing an offending journalist either by imprisonment or a fine. Under Law 93, many offences were punishable by both.

The new draft also sanctions journalists' right to information, and protects them from attacks and insults in the course of their work, with the provision of fines for those found guilty of such offences. The draft states that journalists should not be arrested or questioned except in the presence of a member of the prosecution authorities. It also gives the Press Syndicate the absolute prerogative to take disciplinary action against members guilty of violations of the press code of ethics.

In an opening address to the general assembly, syndicate chairman Ibrahim Nafie was cautiously optimistic. While conceding that many demands remained unmet, a fact which could not be minimised, "I still do not think we will fail to reach a compromise that is a balance between the rights of journalists and citizens. In fact, I think we will find



Nafie, surrounded by council members, briefs the general assembly on the draft press law

such a solution," he said.

"All our general assemblies have been concerned with repealing Law 93 and replacing it with legislation guaranteeing a minimum standard of freedom of expression and the right to publish. I do not need to tell you what a difficult task this is."

The complete legislative reform that journalists sought, he added, "will not happen overnight, nor will it happen in a year or two".

However, he was sure of the government's good intentions. "The country's top leaders have shown an honest desire to come up with suitable legislation to take the Egyptian press to the threshold of the 21st century," he said.

When the floor was opened for speakers, Hussein Abdell-Razek, an opposition newspaper writer, set out his objection to the draft on the grounds that it did not repeal Article Two. He urged journalists to support and campaign for another draft previously

prepared by the Press Syndicate, and enthusiastically advocated a protest sit-in at the syndicate.

Nafie replied that a complete repeal of Article Two would leave a legislative gap, because provisions similar to it had previously existed within the Penal Code before the introduction of Law 93.

Salah Eissa, a leftist and former member of the syndicate's council argued that Article Two imposed harsher penalties than the previously-existing

political writer Mohamed Sid-Al-Ahmed brought up the question of involving a wider constituency in the issue of the press in Egypt. While the problem appeared to be between journalists and the government, it should be possible to involve the international community, he said. He suggested that journalists activate a dialogue with international organisations like the United Nations and UNESCO.

It was later agreed in the assembly's resolutions

that a committee of senior journalists, consisting of Salaheddin Hafer, managing editor of *Al-Ahram*, Mohamed Sid-Al-Ahmed, and Hatem Zakaria, a member of the Press Syndicate Council, would be formed to explain the journalists' viewpoint to concerned international bodies.

The resolutions stated that all the journalists' demands must be met, and that negotiations would continue, led by the syndicate's chairman. The journalists added a new demand: that no writer should be taken into custody in connection with any publication offence, with no exception.

It was also decided that a protest sit-in would take place at the Press Syndicate between noon and 3pm on 27 May, the anniversary of the passing of Law 93, and that journalists would observe 10 June, the date of the first Extraordinary General Assembly dealing with the controversy, as Journalists' Day.

Row over who's to preach

The decision of the Ministry of Al-Awqaf (religious endowments) to ban non-government appointed preachers from mosques has triggered an uproar at Al-Azhar. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

of *Al-Awqaf* is not responsible for dealing with preachers. It is Al-Azhar which is more authorised to deal with matters related to *da'wa* (propagation of Islam)."

Al-Azhar *ulema* issued a statement expressing their concern that the law violated preachers' rights. "We are not an opposition group or a political party, but we are exercising our legitimate and legal duty of defending the rights of the preachers who are not appointed by the ministry," the statement said. Ismail dismissed reports that the *ulema* had previously described the minister as a "secularist".

The Guidance and Preaching Department at Al-Azhar has more than 2,000 preachers, not all of whom are appointed by the ministry, and it is feared that the new law would leave many

of them idle.

Ismail said that negotiations were in progress with the minister of *Al-Awqaf*, and that a memorandum had been submitted to the grand sheikh of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Sayed Tantawi, who had promised to intervene in the matter. However, he has not yet entered into the debate. Ismail said if the negotiations failed, "We shall take our case to court."

But Minister of *Al-Awqaf* Hamdi Zagzag told the *Weekly* that it was very unlikely that the ministry would go back on its decision.

"The penalty for unauthorised people who intrude into the field of *da'wa* should be stiffened," he said. "The current law does little to discourage them, and people with no knowledge of Islam are encouraged to preach in the

mosques."

On Monday, the minister dismissed the charge that security bodies interfere in the process of selecting mosque preachers. He affirmed that the ministry has "a free hand in selecting those who are capable of doing their job properly."

"This is an organisational process," added Abdel-Rashid Salem, undersecretary at the ministry. There was, he said, no need for unauthorised preachers in the system: "We have 54,000 preachers who are qualified to give sermons, know the religion, and will not preach deviant thoughts."

Salem said he saw no point in Al-Azhar scholars taking legal action. "The new law does not exclude Al-Azhar preachers from giving sermons. It simply closes the door to people who are not qualified, and Al-Azhar people are the most qualified."

Sources at the ministry said that the People's Assembly would be debating the draft law sometime soon.

Centrist Brothers contest military trial

The Muslim Brotherhood is appealing against the referral to military trial of 13 members. Three of them also belong to the controversial Centre group, recently denied a licence to become a legal political party. **Amira Howewly** investigates

In an appeal on behalf of 13 members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood against their commitment for military trial, lawyers argued that the decision was linked to the rejection of an application to found a new political party, the Centre Party (*Al-Wassat*), believed by many to be a front for the Brotherhood.

The decision to try the 13 in the military courts was made by presidential decree on 11 May. In the administrative court on Tuesday, lawyers for the accused men argued that the referral of civilians to military trial was unconstitutional. They also claimed that "the regime had the prior intention to transfer the defendants [to military trial] even before the presidential decree was issued."

The appeal also linked the decree with the Centre group's failure to win a licence to become a political party. Groups wishing to become official parties must seek the approval of the government-appointed Political Parties Committee. The appeal argued that the presidential decree gave the committee the chance to reject the establishment of the Centre Party.

Its rejection of the Centre group's application on 13 May — only two days after the presidential decree on the fate of the 13 — is "proof of this," signed Yehia El-Refai, one of the lawyers. The proposition had been presented on 10 January by Abu-Ela Madi, assistant secretary-general of the Engineers Syndicate, leading member of the outlawed Brotherhood, and founder of the would-be party. He was among those arrested.

The Political Parties Committee's refusal to grant a licence cited Law 40 of 1977, which states that each party must have a different platform. The committee has given the same reason to all the applications it has rejected for the last 17 years. However, in the case of the Centre, it had been expected that the committee would reject it for its affiliation to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. The Political Parties Law prohibits the establishment of religious-based parties.

The defendants in the appeal, including Madi and two other members of the would-be party, were arrested on 2 April after the state security prosecution authorities received reports from the Bureau of the State Security Investigations (SSI) that the 13 were involved in illegal actions, according to Hesham Samya, the attorney general for state security.

In addition to being charged with membership of an illegal organisation, the men were accused of "possession of anti-governmental literature, containing language designed to incite hatred and contempt of the regime and to encourage revolt". And, in a clear accusation that the Brotherhood had forced the Centre group in an attempt to infiltrate mainstream politics, the men were charged with "manipulation [of the political system] to try and gain legitimacy by forming the Centre group as a platform for the Muslim Brotherhood and practising unlicensed partisan activity".

Although the majority of the 38 founder members of the would-be party are known for their Islamist orientations, and many are Brotherhood members, the group also includes two Christians, Radiq Habib, a social science researcher, and Bassa Khalil, a worker. The 2 April arrests led to the unusual situation of Habib, as Madi's deputy, taking over as the would-be party's official representative.

Habib's affiliation to the Centre group has been interpreted as an attempt to disguise the group's Brotherhood affiliation by promoting the "Christian" factor, especially as Habib is the son of the head of the Evangelical (protestant) Church in Egypt. Habib, of course, denies this and asserts that the group is a platform for national unity. "The Centre represents a comprehensive view that encompasses Christian values as much as Muslim ones. Rather, it interprets both the Christian and Islamic heritage simultaneously... in one specific civilisation project," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Habib sees the decision to refer three of the would-be party's founders to military trial as an attempt "to terrorise all the party members and all those who think of establishing a serious party".

However, Attorney General for State Security Hesham Samya told the *Weekly* that the military trial decision "was not because of the party. It was a constitutional presidential decision based on the fact that those defendants are members of an illegal organisation." Asked why security forces had not arrested other active Brotherhood members, Samya replied: "We do not arrest people haphazardly. We act only when we receive reports from the SSI referring to specific individuals."

Commenting on Brotherhood claims that in arresting the Centre group, the government was following its usual pattern of refusing the Brotherhood means of political expression, Samya insisted that the party was "just a strategic manoeuvre on the part of the Brotherhood to achieve their aim of taking over the government".

The military trial of the 13, in combination with the rejection of the Centre group has led to speculation over the Brotherhood's next step. As far as the Centre group is concerned, Habib has no doubts. "We will contest the committee's decision," he said. "The Centre is not just a party; it is the first sign of a trend which will grow noticeably in the next few years."

However, the awkward situation of a Christian at the helm of what is more or less a Brotherhood-inspired organisation, together with divisions in the Brotherhood brought about by Madi's decision to establish the Centre group, allegedly, without consulting the Brotherhood's top leadership have cast doubt on the 68-year-old organisation's ability to reach a consensus.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

A super Nile flush?

Claims about a scheduled flushing of the Nile waters were categorically denied by the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources. **Dina Ezzaat** looks at other depollutive efforts

"This is silly!" was how a senior official of the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources this week described recent press reports claiming that the ministry had planned a massive flushing of pollutive waste from the Nile by opening all 12 of the Aswan High Dam's sluice gates.

The official, who preferred to remain anonymous, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that to flush the Nile the sluice gates would need to be opened for at least four consecutive days, throwing

some two billion cubic metres of Nile water into the Mediterranean Sea.

Egypt's annual share of Nile water is 55.5 billion cubic metres. Daily consumption for purposes of irrigation, energy and services could be anything between 60-260 million cubic metres. On average the daily consumption is estimated at 140 million cubic metres. In other words, if carried out, the alleged flushing would cost Egypt about four per cent of its annual quota.

At a time when a country's possession of water can easily lead to war, huge water loss is not the only cause of concern. If all 12 sluice gates are simultaneously opened, crops within the Delta agrarian land would be flooded and hundreds of villages destroyed, resulting in massive damage. "It would be as if we had never built the High Dam," remarked the minister.

According to El-Gharably, the ministry spends at least LE1,000,000 every year to "put the pollution problem under control". In addition, it imposes penalties on all factories and establishments that dump untreated waste into the Nile.

Currently, there are three systems used to combat pollution of the Nile and its canals: mechanical, manual and ecological. The type of system used is determined according to the size of the waterway and the type and severity of the pollution. The mechanical system involves heavy machinery and is used for large waterways, especially in the case of industrial waste pollution. The manual technique requires labourers to remove the weeds with their hands from small canals. The ecological scheme initiated by the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources has introduced species of fish that eat the weeds. It is worth noting that Egypt does not allow the use of chemical treatment for depollutive purposes.

Todays, said El-Gharably, maintenance of the cleanliness level of the Nile waters is the backbone of the pollution-combating scheme. In one four-year term project, that should end next

year, the ministry launched a scheme to clear some 4,000 small canals of weeds. Six governorates in the Delta and Upper Egypt have benefited from this project: El-Menoufia, El-Sharqiya, Kafr El-Shiekh, Giza, Qena and Aswan.

The total cost of the project is estimated at LE24 million, of which LE20 million will be covered by a grant from the Social Development Fund and the rest from the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources. So far, the project has made the irrigation of over 10,000 feddans a smoother running operation.

De-pollution does not appear to be the sole issue, as Masoud El-Khaif, director of the canal cleanliness operation at the ministry, points out: "People need to realise that not at any point will the Nile be completely free of weeds and waste. Even if we were to flush the Nile tomorrow, this what? People will soon be dumping waste in it again!"

The continuous human abuse of the Nile is not the only reason that the river is polluted, experts explain. According to them, there are at least 20 species of floating, semi-floating and submerged weeds that grow in the waterways of the Nile. "From a technical point of view, there is no way that you can remove all of these," explained El-Gharably. "And from the point of view of ecological balance, if you remove all of these they will have other species growing," she added.

Sources at the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources emphasise that environment awareness is an essential complement of their work. They say that if they keep cleaning the Nile and the factories keep dumping their waste in the river, then it becomes a vicious circle.



photo: Seed Fag El-Nour

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Ministers launch budget debate

Hot off the press, the national development plan and the budget for fiscal 1996/97 were presented to the Peoples Assembly

The People's Assembly this week jumped headlong into the annual parliamentary debates on the main objectives of this, the last year of the five-year plan. Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri said the main aims are to complete infrastructure projects and strike a financial and monetary balance.

"For years we concentrated on building the infrastructure and realising financial balance," he said on Monday. "This plan comes in the context of completing these two objectives in light of the existing potentials." El-Ganzouri added that the plan also aims to increase investments by 30 per cent, reduce foreign borrowing and address social needs.

Moreover, he stated, a number of national projects, such as the Sinai national development project for the resettlement of around 3.5 million people, the Upper Egypt national project to resettle around 6 million, must be launched. The financial costs of these projects are valued at LE20 billion. "In addition, we need as much as LE11 billion to establish some urgent projects in the fields of cement, paper,

reinforced steel and wood," El-Ganzouri said, emphasising that creating an atmosphere of confidence between the state and investors is essential in securing the huge investments needed.

Going into the details of this year's plan, Zafar El-Beshri, the minister of state for planning, stated that foremost among the plan's objectives is raising the gross domestic product (GDP) to around LE162.1 billion, an LE8.8 billion increase over last year's GDP. The other priorities include reducing the balance of payments deficit by LE1.4 billion, increasing revenues from the service and tourism sectors, Suez Canal tolls and remittances of Egyptian workers abroad by 4.2 per cent, as well as creating around 15,500 new job opportunities.

He noted that the decline in the average GDP over the last four years is primarily due to the state's 1990 anti-inflationary measures which resulted in a sweeping economic recession. However, added El-Beshri, the implementation of the second stage of an economic reform programme put an end to these measures, concentrated instead on increasing commodity supplies and expanding on private in-

vestments — two new factors which will lead to raising the GDP. The plan's investments, he stated, are estimated at LE44.4 billion, of which LE5.12 billion will be for public sector investments, LE24.3 billion for private and cooperative investments, and LE15 billion for government projects.

El-Beshri highlighted some of the achievements secured in the last few years. He said the overall volume of investments over the last 14 years was nearly LE328 billion, of which LE162 billion was spent on infrastructure projects, LE137.5 on commodity sectors, and LE27.9 billion on social service sectors. However, he added, the private contribution to national investments rose to LE8.6 billion (49.2 per cent from a mere 20 per cent in 1981) in the last four years, against LE88 billion worth of public investments. He also noted that approximately 60,000 new jobs were created, and a \$600 million balance of payments surplus was realised.

Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib said that all social and economic efforts in the next few years should be aimed at raising national growth rates to

a level three times that of the population growth rate. He noted that the 1996/97 state budget, estimated at LE77.5 billion, is based on a number of dimensions: providing subsidised goods to limited income and poor classes, rationalising public spending, concentrating on maintenance programmes, providing basic social services, achieving an optimal use of the unsold inventory in public companies and organisations and strictly adhering to the schedule of payments for foreign debts.

With regard to subsidies, El-Gharib pointed out that LE4 billion from the budget was allocated to provide basic food commodities at reduced prices, provide low interest-rate loans for vital projects such as low-cost housing and land reclamation, reduce the price of public sector transportation, contribute to health insurance for school students and provide subsidised drugs and drinking water.

He added that educational, health, social and cultural services received LE16.2 billion; social insurance was allocated LE6.8 billion; salaries and pensions received LE22.8 billion; maintenance and operation projects, LE3.3 billion; and LE23.1 billion

for payments on foreign and local debts. El-Gharib noted also that one of the main objectives of the budget is to meet the needs of the armed forces. He did not, however, give an exact figure for military expenditures.

According to El-Gharib, the government is currently coordinating with the Central Bank for rescheduling around LE23 billion in local debts. At the same time, he added, the Tax Authority has recently taken serious steps to improve the performance of tax departments and to combat all kinds of tax evasion. "We have already opened new departments for fighting tax evasion," he said. "Moreover, all state revenue-generating authorities were linked with the Public Tax Authority." Foreign borrowing, he concluded, will be a final resort in securing financing for new projects. "Foreign borrowing will be confined to a very limited number of projects that are able to repay the debt themselves," stated El-Gharib.

More than 100 MPs are expected to deliver their comments on the state's development plan and budget over the next three weeks.

Market report

Construction sale triggers recovery

WISHES sometimes come true. Market experts' predictions that a recovery was on the horizon found footing during the week ending 16 May as the General Market Index rose to 204.72 points, its highest level in six weeks. This jump was largely the result of the sale of 75 per cent of the shares Madinat Nasr Construction and Development Company last week, when the firm was privatised.

The manufacturing sector witnessed a similar increase in its index, which gained 3.38 points to close at 266.42. Riding on the crest of news that 10 per cent of its shares were to be put up for sale, the value of the Egyptian Financial and Industrial Company's stock soared, recording a 600 per cent increase in value to close at LE16 per share. Less impressive gains were realised by the Paint and Chemical Industries Company, whose shares gained LE17 per share to close at LE620.

Other companies, however, did not fare so well, with 16 of the sector's firms losing ground. The share value of the General Company for Paper Manufacturing (RAKTA) fell by LE4.45 to level off at LE24.5 while those of the Alexandria Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries Company lost LE3.26 per share to close at LE70.5.

The financial and real estate sector also managed to realise some gains as the sector's index inched up by 1.29 points to close at 204.11. Shares of the Egyptian Engineers for Arab Real Estate Investment rocketed up by LE71 per share to close at LE142. Still the star of the market, shares of the Madinat Nasr Construction and Development Company rose to LE73. The Misr International Bank (MIBank) also had its share of gains. Closing LE12.5 higher than their opening price, MIBank's shares levelled off at LE272.5.

The service sector, usually fairly sluggish when it comes to trading activity on the market, registered a marginal increase of 0.72 points to close at 137.19 points. For the second consecutive week, shares of El-Tarsana Tourist Projects Company increased in value. This week, they gained LE69.4 to close at LE305 per share.

Rights group slams labour law

A recent study conducted by the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA), a non-governmental organisation long concerned with human rights issues, charges that the new labour law may have an adverse impact on workers' conditions and contribute towards increasing the level of unemployment.

The study criticised the proposed unified labour law for allowing the fixing of workers' wages and banning labour strikes.

The draft law, which is to replace the current labour legislation on the books, redefines the worker-employer relationship, and is designed to meet the requirements of the privatisation programme and the newly-liberalised economy.

However, concern on the part of labour representatives surrounding the text and tone of the draft law has prompted them to seek aid of organisations such as CHRLA to persuade the government to change some of the controversial articles in the draft before it is approved by the People's Assembly.

The draft was supposed to have been approved by the Assembly during its current session, but heated debates on the text have resulted in a delay.

Tackling the issue, the CHRLA study is made up of three parts. The first discusses the reasoning behind, and the aims of the new labour law. The second part is a list of the centre's reservations on several articles to the law, while the third part is a list of recommendations and suggestions for amending the draft.

The proposed law, said Mohamed El-Ghammi, a CHRLA researcher, is made up of 270 articles while the current labour law has only 175. The reason behind the additional articles in the new law is that all the articles related to workers have been collected from other laws and placed under the umbrella of

Trade Union and labour reaction has hitherto delayed the enactment of a new and unified labour law, designed to facilitate economic liberalisation. A human rights group has joined the fray. Mona El-Fiqi reports

the new draft law.

According to the CHRLA study, there are several main faults in the new law. The first is that wages have been fixed regardless of the increase in prices. Despite the fact that in previous legislation, wages were kept in line with the rate of inflation, article 34 of the draft fixes wages for the next three years.

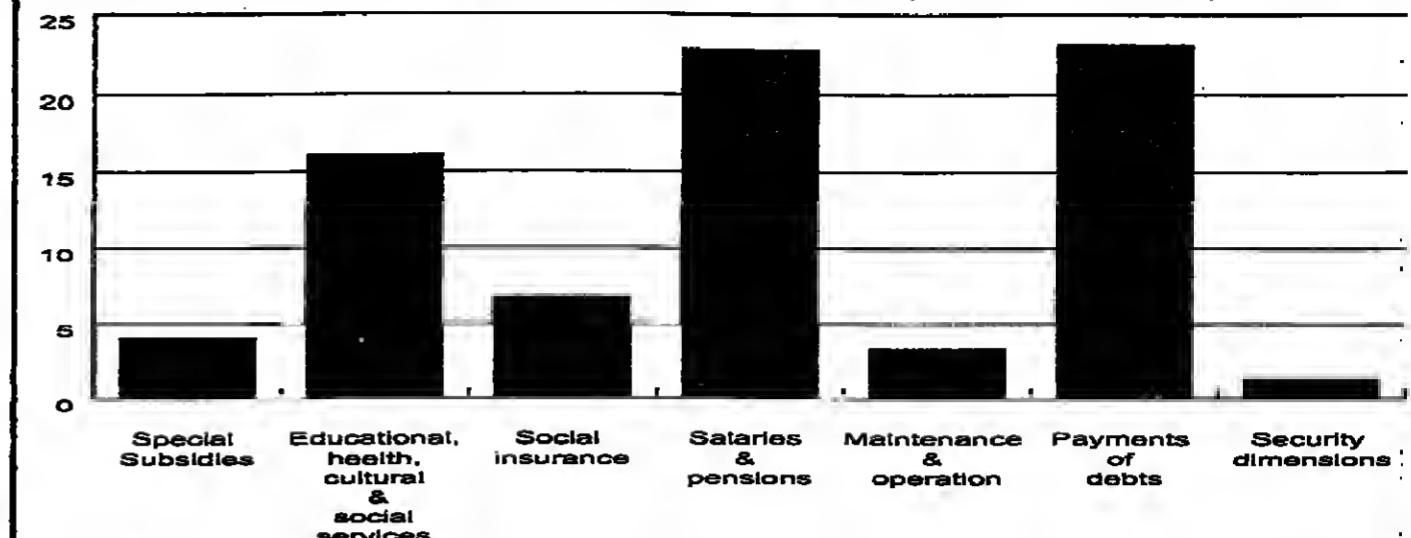
The second main shortcoming is that several methods for reducing the size of the labour force have been introduced, thereby potentially increasing unemployment. Article 56 of the draft includes 11 obligations which employees must fulfil in their workplace or risk being fired. This article, said the study, gives employers the means by which to easily reduce their work force. Moreover, article 57 includes a ban on six of labour's basic rights such as collecting donations or distributing publications. Under the new law, employer approval must be secured prior to engaging in these activities. This provision, noted El-Ghammi, runs counter to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

Also in the interest of the employer, CHRLA claims, is article 198 which gives employers the right to close down their business if it faces financial problems. Therefore, according to the proposed draft law, workers could be fired as a result of financial or administrative problems for which they are not to blame.

Edited by Ghada Ragab



Items of state budget 1996/1997 (LE 77.5 billion)



EU partnership in the balance

The Egyptian-EU partnership is scheduled to be finalised later this year. At a Cairo University seminar this week, Egyptian and European experts debated the pros and cons of the deal. Sheereen Abdel-Razek attended

A two-day seminar entitled "The International Seminar on the Egyptian-EU Partnership," held this week shed light on a number of thorny issues affecting the degree to which Egypt will benefit from the agreement it is scheduled to sign with the European Union (EU) later this year. The seminar was organised by Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science and Germany's Friedrich Ebert Institution.

While discussing the potential trade gains and policy issues resulting from the agreement, Glenn Harrison, a professor of economics at the University of South Carolina, described Egypt as a "small" player on the international arena in terms of its participation in the global economy. He stressed the importance of liberalising Egypt's trade policies both on the regional and international levels.

Mustafa El-Said, head of the People's Assembly's Economic Committee, stated that Egypt should first cooperate with its Arab and regional neighbours before hammering out a deal with the European countries. "Negotiating individually with the EU should be Egypt's second step," he said. El-Said added that Egypt must first strengthen its negotiating position with regard to the EU in order to secure better trade terms.

Another major issue brought up during the seminar was the need to increase the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Egypt and the EU. In fiscal 1995/96, the level of FDI into Egypt amounted to only \$500 million, or 0.2 per cent of the gross national product (GNP). Many of the participants also stressed the fact that the countries of central Europe are also competing with Egypt to be recipients of European investment.

Olivier Pastore, the assistant general manager of France's GB Bank, noted that while 12 central European countries, which have a cumulative population of 100 million will receive \$2 billion in FDI, the 10 Mediterranean countries, with an aggregate population of 300 million, that will sign a partnership agreement with the EU will only receive \$6 billion in FDI.

The share of foreign, non-Arab annual in-

vestment to Egypt during the first phase of the economic reform programme, said Mokhtar Khattab, a consultant to the Ministry of Public Sector Enterprise, totalled LE433 million, or 21 per cent of the total annual investment in the country. However, prior to the reform programme, this figure totalled LE249 million. This is just a marginal increase, said Khattab, considering the increase in the number of Egyptian projects which were launched.

To improve this situation, he said, a number of drastic changes must be implemented in order to attract EU investment to Egypt. The country must first provide a favourable macroeconomic framework including stabilising exchange rates and liberalising the pricing system. In addition, incentive packages for investors should be offered.

Mahmoud Mohieddin, an assistant professor of economics at the FEPS, stated that Egypt has to promote "trade and competition policies" in order to compensate for the negative impact of lifting trade barriers. The first step, he said, is to implement trade liberalisation policies since they encourage competition and help familiarise domestic firms with foreign competition. Once these are well established, protection measures may be introduced later, said Mohieddin.

However, he said, the problem with liberalising trade is that some items such as real estate are non-tradeable. Consequently, these items will not be subjected to foreign competition and will continue to be protected.

Despite the problems which may result from the partnership, Ali Soleiman, undersecretary of the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation, said there are many benefits to be accrued. The partnership, he said, will help promote the development of human resources in that 50 per cent of the \$6 billion earmarked for the Mediterranean countries will be channelled into social programmes such as education, vocational training and housing. In addition, the EU has introduced what is known as the Mediterranean Initiative, which includes university exchange programmes and campus cooperation training programmes.

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Pre-election questions

While the PNA has thrown its full weight behind Peres and Labour, Hamas remains a key player in the Israeli elections



FIRST CABINET: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat is flanked by members of his cabinet after Saturday's swearing-in ceremony in Ramallah. The distribution of the portfolios is yet to be announced but the new cabinet is mostly made up of Fatah members and supporters in the Palestinian Legislative Council, elected last January. Two notable exceptions are the former mayor of Beirat, Abdell-Jawad Saleh, expected to become minister of agriculture, and Bashir Barghouti, secretary general of the communist party. (photo: Reuters)

With the Israeli general elections around the corner, the PNA has cast its vote for Labour. But, writes Tarek Hassan from Gaza, the move could backfire

Several days ago on Israeli television, Mahmoud Abbas, the architect of the Oslo Accords, better known as Abu Mazen, indicated that Palestinians favour a Labour Party victory and Peres' re-election in the forthcoming 29 May Israeli general elections. Earlier, and during her visit to Holland, Suha Arafat, wife of the Palestinian leader, was more explicit in expressing Palestinians' wish to see Peres continue in power.

President Yasser Arafat could not agree more. As soon as Ahmed Al-Tibi announced that he would pull his party, the Arab Movement for Change, out of the election, and call on his supporters to vote for Peres on Tuesday, Arafat applauded. He telephoned Al-Tibi, hailed his decision and declared that he wanted Al-Tibi to continue as his personal advisor.

These statements are merely a sample of the Palestinian National Authority's (PNA) position vis-à-vis the Israeli elections. This is, however, not the first time that Palestinians have thrown their weight behind Israel's Labour Party. Their support of Labour has its roots in the previous Israeli elections when Arafat, Abu Mazen and the Labour Party agreed to delay progress in the Madrid negotiations until the elections were over. The main reason behind this decision was to defeat Shamir and pave the way for a Labour victory. Their efforts were rewarded with the fall of Likud, and both sides crowned their success with the signing of the Oslo Accords.

While in the past the Palestinians and Israelis took pains to hide their complicity so as not to antagonise the Israeli electorate which would not take kindly to the intervention of the Palestinians in Israeli domestic affairs, this time, both sides

have decided to go public.

Palestinian officials are now not only openly stating their preference, they are taking a stand in favour of Labour and have even engaged in political manoeuvring to ensure a victory for Peres. Their manoeuvres have taken place on two levels. First, the PNA has backed the Clinton administration's plans to bolster the chances of a Peres victory. Second, it has made intensive contacts during the last few days to persuade Arab groups inside Israel to vote for Peres and Labour.

These efforts coincide with the continuation of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on security issues, despite the fact that such discussions during campaign-time are not likely to bear fruit. Nonetheless, these talks serve two purposes. On one hand, they serve to assure Palestinians that the peace process is ongoing and, on the other, they demonstrate that the Israeli government is capable of holding a dialogue with the Palestinians which benefits Israeli national security interests. This will appeal to the electorate.

By endorsing Labour, both publicly and in an official capacity, the Palestinian side now appears to have given its seal of approval to Israel's security measures in the self-rule areas. This was done under the pretext of preventing military operations that may bring about a Likud victory. The 10-week closures imposed by Israel in the self-rule areas has not, so far, met with effective official opposition. The Labour government has now allowed certain goods into, and out of, the self-rule areas as part of a calculated process to ensure calm on Palestinian streets, but without letting the situation have an effect in Israel.

The PNA believes that it can reach a peace set-

tlement with a Labour government, but not with Likud or other right-wing parties. In fact, a Likud victory would be a nightmare in the eyes of the PNA. However, it is this same threat that prompted certain elements in the Palestinian arena to criticise the zealous Palestinian official support of Peres and Labour.

This line of thinking, critical of the unconditional backing of Peres and his party, has disciples in the PNA and Fatah movement; the latter, they argue, to bolster the chances of a Peres victory. Second, it has made intensive contacts during the last few days to persuade Arab groups inside Israel to vote for Peres and Labour.

Their arguments fall along one of two lines.

Some see this full-scale backing as possibly detracting from Labour's popularity among Israeli voters who reject the notion of Palestinian interference in their domestic affairs; in addition,

should Likud win, the PNA would find itself in a difficult position.

Others go as far as to claim that a Likud victory will be more beneficial to the peace process in the coming stage. They keep reminding Palestinians that it was Labour which occupied Arab lands in 1967, annexed Jerusalem, began the settlement construction programme and invented the policy of expelling unwanted Palestinians. They also add that the Camp David Accords were signed when Likud ruled in Israel, and that the Madrid peace conference was convened also while the Likud was in power.

The most popular argument, however, among those Palestinians who oppose the backing of the Israeli Labour Party is that Labour is opportunistic. It says yes to peace and at the same time imposes a blockade on the self-rule areas and declares war on Lebanon. Likud, they maintain, at least has a clear policy. Moreover, the peace process is irreversible — Likud knows this. If Likud comes to power, they argue, the Palestinians may be able to win friends on the international arena who are also staunch supporters of Labour. As it stands, Labour now monopolises all the international support.

In either case, the debate still rages on in the Palestinian arena, despite the official stand clearly favouring Labour. And, while those opposing factions in the PNA have been forced to defer to a moderate official stand, the questions they raised in their campaign may still be pertinent: What if Likud really wins?

Hamas feels the heat

Wracked by internal divisions and a continued clampdown, Hamas is getting caught up in the frenzy of Israel's pre-election fever. Samia Nkrumah reports

The PLO-Israeli agreements were sold to the Israeli public with the understanding that the PLO would clamp down on the Islamic resistance movement of Hamas. The growing influence of Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank during the Intifada years had persuaded Israel to accept the PLO as a negotiating partner. Subsequent events reveal that though Israel, in collaboration with the Palestine National Authority (PNA), has resorted to all possible means to diminish Hamas' influence, the movement remains a force to reckon with. Many analysts believe that Hamas might end up determining the outcome of the Israeli elections by preventing, or resuming, its military operations.

Last Friday, Ezzeddin Al-Qassam battalions, the military wing of Hamas, issued a statement declaring that it would refrain from carrying out military operations until the Israeli elections are over if the PNA stops pursuing its members. On Monday, Mahmoud Al-Zahar, Hamas spokesman in Gaza, called on Al-Qassam to halt its military operations pending the elections. This move created a rift with Hamas leaders abroad.

Ibrahim Ghoshe, Hamas spokesman in Amman, accused Al-Zahar of speaking for himself rather than Hamas. Ghoshe told the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat* that the legitimate leaders of Hamas are Ahmed Yassin, Abdel-Fattah Dokhan, Abderrahman Al-Rantissi and Ibrahim Maqadmeh — all held in Israeli and PNA prisons. Ghoshe added that he fears Al-Zahar will come to the same fate as Emad Al-Falouji, a former founder of Hamas' military wing and now a member of the newly formed Palestinian cabinet. He added that: "Resistance operations will continue as long as the occupation continues."

On Tuesday Al-Zahar told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that his statements did not reflect a personal position. Commenting on Ghoshe's statements, he said that he refuses to be drawn into a wrangling match with his counterpart in Amman. "Reactions from inside the territories are the proof of my credibility," he said. Al-Zahar quoted Al-Qassam's 18 May statement: "We strongly reject the content of the false statement issued this week under the name of Hamas which criticised Mahmoud Al-Zahar, one of the political leaders of the movement in the Gaza Strip."

Defending his position, Al-Zahar said that it was in Hamas' interest not to carry out any attacks before Israel's general elections. "As an Islamic movement, we do not back Zionist candidates, be they Likud or Labour. If we appear to be helping either party, our credibility would be compromised."

The political climate inside the self-rule areas has highlighted the growing differences between the leaders of Hamas inside and outside. Inside Gaza, Hamas is a contest for power and popularity, but is subject to many constraints. Unlike Hamas leaders abroad, those inside have a lot at stake. They aim to influence policies and events within a given situation governed by many other factors, not least of which their relationship with the PNA.

Hamas' popularity among the Palestinian public in the West Bank and Gaza depends partly on its opposition to the current peace process. Barriers to suicide operations in the pre-election days, Hamas may become indirectly involved in the peace settlement if Labour wins.

Al-Zahar's latest conciliatory gesture is in line

with the changing strategy of the movement's political wing, which began with the return of the PLO leadership to the self-rule areas. This became evident during the Palestinian election campaign. During the January Palestinian elections, Hamas supported independent Islamic candidates who it hoped would act as go-betweens with the PNA and the movement in future dialogues.

The shift was further consolidated with the official establishment of the National Islamic Salvation Party (NISP) last March, made up primarily of ex-Hamas members. The NISP's aim is to participate in political life inside the self-rule areas through the preservation of a network of social and religious services. It was reported recently that the NISP has asked the PNA for the education or social affairs portfolio.

Paradoxically, Hamas's political wing appears to be softening its tone at a time when Hamas activists are confronted with the ever growing threat from both the Israeli and PNA security forces. Since February's suicide bombings, the PNA has adopted a harsher attitude towards Hamas by arresting 900 Islamic activists including Al-Zahar who was subsequently released. Around 300 activists still languish in Palestinian prisons, according to Al-Zahar.

The Israeli government is under pressure from some quarters to reinstate the condition of extrading Hamas suspects arrested by the PNA to Israel. With a week to go before general elections, the Labour-led government wishes to appeal to its public more than ever. Israeli forces continue to arrest and pursue Islamic activists within PNA-controlled areas, with little objection from the PNA. This week, Israel arrested Hassan Salameh, a leading Al-Qassam guerrilla in Hebron who was alleged to have masterminded three of the four suicide bombings in Israel last February. The latest spate of arrests included 19 activists in Arab East Jerusalem on Tuesday.

More importantly, Hamas senses a backlash as support for suicide bombings dwindles and the closure of the self-rule areas continues. A poll of 1,397 West Bank and Gaza residents showed that support among Palestinians for attacks against Israel dropped from 32 per cent in June 1995 to eight per cent last March, when the poll was taken.

The wish of Hamas leaders in Gaza to improve relations with the PNA is an attempt to avert a scenario that Israel hopes to see. Israel has not ceased to remind the PNA that Hamas poses a challenge to its authority and that of Arafat. Al-Zahar confirmed to the *Weekly* that the political leadership of Hamas in Gaza sought a meeting on Monday with the PNA. "It was simply to ask for the release of some 300 Islamic activists in PNA prisons, most of whom are Hamas members," he said.

It remains to be seen whether further meetings will follow. Past experiences of PNA-Hamas dialogues were fraught with difficulties. Last year's talks between the PNA and Hamas were originally requested by Rabin. After his demise, the Israeli government lost interest in the dialogue, and so did the PNA. The PNA-Hamas rapprochement might have been a valuable publicity ploy to unite Palestinians prior to the Palestinian elections and in anticipation of further Israeli redeployment in the West Bank a few months ago. In the run-up to the Israeli elections, the PNA would rather isolate Hamas to earn Israeli approval and bolster Shimon Peres' chances of being re-elected.

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- To look after the relevant documentation in a systematic manner.
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First Secretary Gender and Development
Development Cooperation Section
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18 Hassan Sabri Street
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Fax: 341 5249

Baghdad bends to pressure

In an attempt to bolster its devastated economy, Iraq signed the long-awaited United Nations oil-for-food deal despite its tough conditions. Sherine Bahaa reports on the agreement and gauges reactions

After three and a half months of protracted negotiations, Iraq and the UN signed an agreement allowing the sale of Iraqi oil for humanitarian purposes this week. Baghdad had previously opposed the deal, convinced that it undermined Iraqi sovereignty.

The agreement, known as the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), allows Baghdad to sell \$2 billion worth of its oil every six months to buy food and medicine and ease the impact of the 1990 economic embargo. It is estimated that the accord, which allows Iraqi oil back into international markets, will be implemented within four to eight weeks.

The UN has stipulated that Iraq's oil revenues be closely monitored by the UN and used solely for humanitarian supplies. Iraq has agreed to offer diplomatic immunity to those monitoring the distribution of the food and medicine.

A few days before the deal was signed on Monday, CNN broadcast a UN human rights organisation report that exposed the deteriorating conditions in Iraq, hit by almost six years of economic sanctions. The report numbered the deaths of Iraqi children as a result of the sanctions at around 500,000.

Introduced after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the sanctions have barred all trade with Iraq except for the import of food, medicine and agricultural machinery. Basic medicine is too expensive for most people.

A week before Iraqi President Saddam Hussein approved the draft UN agreement, trade was stagnant. Shoppers and traders had actually blamed the fluctuating value of their currency on the protracted talks. Earlier in the negotiations, positive remarks from either the UN or Baghdad would strengthen the dinar's value.

Hossam Issa, an Egyptian professor of international law, criticised what he perceived as unjust and tough UN conditions by which the Iraqi regime now must abide. "The US insisted on introducing conditions that encroach on the Iraqi's own sovereignty," he said.

According to Issa, the US was being intransigent since "Iraq's entry into the oil market will be a drawback to the US since the price of oil will decrease." Oil revenues usually filter back to the US through its companies in the Gulf region.

According to political observers, the sanctions have overtaken their mandate as they are now diplomatic as well as political. A lawyer who researched economic conditions in Iraq over the last six years said that limited military sanctions would not have "caused such hardships to the people."

"Sanctions are not undermining the Iraqi president. It is the Iraqi people who are weakened by the sanctions," one diplomat said. "But they [the Iraqi people] are blaming the West, not Saddam."

The US and the UK pushed for the renewal of the sanctions in the UN Security Council's periodical review every 60 days.

"Pressure is a crucial factor," said Issa. "The isolation and containment of Iraq has always been a US policy priority."

Israel violates ceasefire

A LEBANESE woman was injured by shrapnel Monday when the Israeli army fired several rounds of artillery at an area near the village of Kfar Tibut, outside the Israeli-occupied "security zone". A day earlier, two Hezbollah guerrillas were killed and one Israeli soldier wounded during fighting, which broke out when an Israeli patrol spotted Hezbollah guerrillas near Beaufort castle, inside the so-called security zone. Hezbollah said fighters used rockets and machine guns to ambush the Israeli patrol.

The woman was the first civilian casualty since Israel and Hezbollah pledged last month not to target civilians. The Israeli shelling violated the 27 April ceasefire ending Israel's 17-day onslaught which left more than 170 people dead in South Lebanon.

Meanwhile, in Washington, negotiators representing Syria, Lebanon, Israel, France, and the US, continued talks on monitoring the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah. A final accord, intended to protect civilians and halt the exchange of missiles between Hezbollah and Israel, has not yet been reached. France and the US will share, in rotation, chairmanship of the monitoring team.

Yilmaz has second thoughts

TURKISH Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, fighting to keep his fragile coalition in power against a serious challenge by Islamists, questioned the value of a military training accord with Israel that has angered Muslim and Arab countries.

Turkish newspapers yesterday quoted Yilmaz as telling a closed meeting of his Motherland Party that the secret Turkish-Israeli pact, leaked last month to Turkish media, had done more harm than good. "The harm of this accord has outweighed its advantages. We are working on it. This has to be corrected," Yilmaz was quoted as saying.

On Saturday, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel escaped an assassination attempt by a lone gunman who said he was protesting the military agreement. Demirel was in Izmit, 50 kilometres east of Istanbul, to inaugurate several factories. A police officer and a journalist were injured.

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

Florence Nightingale, perhaps the most illustrious nurse in history, formed a battalion of nurses who, during the Crimean War (1854-56) risked life and limb to rush to the rescue of the combatants, regardless of whose side they were fighting on. Her selfless humanitarianism became legend in its time. Hardly had the ink dried on the Paris treaty that ended the war than the drive began to give Nightingale's calling a legal framework. The document was the Geneva Convention signed in 1864 by all the major powers of the era, marking the official birth of the most famous philanthropic organisation in the history of mankind: the Red Cross.

The convention stipulates that all parties in war must guarantee the safety of ambulances, hospitals, medical personnel and all those engaged in the service of aiding victims of war. Individuals thus engaged would wear a distinguishing emblem: the symbol of Geneva — a red cross on a white background.

Egypt was not far removed from these developments. Indeed, it sent a 12,000-man force to fight alongside the Turkish forces in the Crimean War and one can be certain some of them were recipients of the philanthropy of Nightingale and her colleagues. In fact, they may well have been the first to advocate her calling when they returned to Egypt.

In addition, Egypt's large European communities that grew at an astounding speed during this period were naturally riveted to events in their home countries, particularly given the many wars in which the continent embroiled itself at the time. It was only natural, therefore, that the various communities would rally to enlist donations for their homelands, a good deal of which went to the Red Cross.

At the same time, a significant number of Egyptians took up residence in Europe, some as political exiles after the fall of Cairo to the British occupation, and others as members of study missions abroad or other cultural missions. They were, therefore, able to experience at first hand this humanitarian side of Western culture and undoubtedly they hoped it could be imitated in their own country. Among the first wave of these individuals was the illustrious Sheikh Mohamed Abdin, who left Egypt in 1882 and spent several years in voluntary exile in Paris. Mohamed Abdin was the chairman of the first committee to call for the formation of the Red Crescent. There was also Fathi Zaghlul — brother to the famous Egyptian leader Sayed Zaghlul — who had also spent a stretch of time in Paris in order to complete his doctorate of law.

That these individuals were instrumental in some capacity in the formation of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society must come as a shock to those who know something of its history. What is commonly known is that the Red Crescent was founded in October 1911, that it was headed by Sheikh Ali Yusef, owner of *Al-Mu'ayid* newspaper and that it received the patronage of the Khedive Abbas II and other members of the royal family. It is also commonly known that it was founded in response to a war that erupted on Egypt's western border, the Ottoman-Italian (or Tripoli) war. Italy's campaign to carve off Libya from the Ottoman Empire provoked a fury among Egyptians who attempted to volunteer to fight alongside the forces of the Supreme Porte. Prevented from doing so by the British occupation authorities, their only alternative was to seek to lend humanitarian aid. In this they succeeded with the founding of the Red Crescent which sent three medical missions to the front, and

the archives are replete with the communiques between London and Rome sent in order to insure these missions safe passage.

While this may be the textbook version of the history of the Red Crescent, *Al-Ahram*'s archives tell us that its origins date back some 15 years earlier. Indeed its first certificate of birth was issued by Ahmed Fathi Zaghlul who sent the following notice to *Al-Ahram* which featured it on the first page of its 10 May 1896 edition.

"On Tuesday, 26 April 1896 a meeting was held in the home of Ahmed Suyufi Pasha in Abibasya. The meeting was attended by Amin Fikri Pasha, director of the royal cabinet, Mohamed Maher Pasha, the governor of Cairo, Sheikh Mohamed Abdin, Judge in the court of appeals, Prosecutor General Yusuf Sultan Bey, Sheikh Abdel-Rahim El-Demerdash, the Hajj Mohammed El-Helw, deputy representative for Moroccan affairs, Abdel Rahim Bek Higazi, a notable in the capital, Shimon Arish and Chief Magistrate Ahmed Fathi Zaghlul. The above individuals met to form a committee the function of which is to enlist contributions on behalf of wounded soldiers and the families and orphans of those who died in battle. The committee, which will be under the patronage of His Royal Highness the Khedive, has elected Mohamed Abdin as chairman, Ahmed Suyufi as its treasurer and Fathi Zaghlul as its secretary. Notice will be issued inviting the contributions of benevolent and charitable individuals."

This announcement alone gives us much important information. Firstly, the names reveal a broad representation of social and commercial interests: large landowners such as Ahmed Suyufi Pasha in whose home the meeting was held, prominent merchants such as Higazi Bey, senior government officials and religious dignitaries, not to mention those eminent intellectuals who took on the responsibilities that would bring the society to reality.

Secondly, it appeared that the patronage of the khedive would be more than in name only. Abbas II would take a personal interest in the society's welfare. Some of the members of the committee were close to the ruler, and we learn that two days after the committee was formed, "they were honoured to be received by His Royal Highness who expressed his keen and sympathetic support for the endeavour and who was the first to demonstrate his goodwill by offering a generous contribution."

Thirdly, rare in the history of national associations of the time, there was no European representation, a phenomenon that is all the more odd in this instance given the European origins of the idea. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the religious standards adopted for the organisation that emerged from the Geneva Convention would not be appropriate to an Egyptian context. Instead, the Egyptian society chose for its emblem a more apt religious symbol — the crescent — even though it retained the red colour. Significantly, only a few weeks before this society was founded, the Baron Felix de Menasce tried to found an Egyptian chapter of the Red Cross. The idea, however, was not well received and was soon forgotten.

Finally, that the society was to help "the wounded and the families and orphans of those killed in battle" indicates that the Red Crescent, like the Red Cross, was an expression of the humanitarian counterpart to the horrors and indignities of war. In this case, however, it was not the Crimean War, but the Anglo-Egyptian expedition in Sudan. Indeed, *Al-*

130 It was the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1864 that inspired the founding of its Egyptian counterpart, the Red Crescent Society. The idea of creating the Egyptian society was born at a meeting of senior officials, notables and intellectuals under the patronage of Khedive Abbas II exactly 100 years ago. The society began its work two years later. Dr Yunan Labib Rizq traces the birth of the society through reports published by the newspaper *Al-Ahram* in 1875

Ahram indicates that the drive for such a society began almost a year previously, during the period between the occupation of Dongola in 1896 to the fall of Khartoum in 1898. We note from the following *Al-Ahram* excerpts that the drive originated from the provinces.

On 24 May 1897, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Mansoura reports, "The day before yesterday, Sheikh Awad Taha and several notables of Mansoura hosted a charity benefit for the Red Crescent Society. Among the prominent guests present were the provincial directors from Daqahliya and Gharbiya, the deputy director, the chief of police and magistrates from the courts."

Evidently the spirit of goodwill infected the provincial director of Gharbiya who was present on this occasion, for less than two months later *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Tanta reported a similar function held in the capital of this central Delta province.

If these benefits contributed to create the appropriate climate for the establishment of the society, the press, and notably *Al-Ahram*, was instrumental in promoting it. We select from among the many articles of the period the following item, entitled "The Red Crescent", that took up most of the second page in *Al-Ahram*'s 19 April 1898 edition. After describing the function of the organisation, the author writes, "One can conceive of no higher duty than to lend one's support to this benevolent and humanitarian charitable organisation. The wounded in battle should be more deserving of our pity than any other human being and the families of those killed in action should have the first claim on our compassion and assistance. We have no doubt that patriotic citizens will hasten to serve humanity by enlisting their contributions to the wounded soldiers of the Egyptian army."

We detect in this article some differences between the nascent Red Crescent and the Red Cross. The focus was not so much on medical rescue in the field of battle. Not only were there few Egyptian nurses, it is difficult to imagine a contingent of Egyptian women travelling independently to the Sudan to give succour to wounded soldiers when tradition still confined Egyptian women to the hearth and home. Perhaps this explains the greater focus on helping the families of the victims and soliciting monetary contributions.

At the same time, one assumes that, while the British forces that participated in the Sudan expedition were tended to by the Red Cross, the same services were not available to the Egyptians. This would explain the need, not to open an Egyptian chapter of the Red Cross, but to found a society that

gave special attention to Egyptian forces.

It was perhaps the battle of Athura, the last major engagement before the fall of Omdurman, that gave the final impetus to the creation of the Red Crescent. In fact, the casualties of this battle were relatively few — 10 killed and 90 wounded. Yet it was only 20 days later that Suyufi Pasha was to host the meeting that would give official birth to the organisation.

The new organisation was greatly feted — a reception with the khedive, a meeting with the prime minister, contributions of five pounds from each minister, a considerable amount in those days, an enthusiastic promotion campaign launched by *Al-Ahram* that brought in nearly 3,000 pounds. It was only natural after such auspicious beginnings that the founders should continue to build their society. They held another meeting, this time in Suyufi Pasha's house in El-Ghourya, in order to formulate a notice, signed by Sheikh Mohamed Abdin, which was in a sense a charter of the new organisation and therefore, deserves close reading.

The greater part of the notice was dedicated to explaining the motives for establishing the organisation. These were to care for "the distraught and helpless orphans and families of soldiers killed in action" and for "those wounded in the course of battle, but too disabled to gain a livelihood even if they recover, for these courageous men are to the people of this country."

It then enjoins all "patriotic Egyptians to lend their unstinting support to this noble endeavour. We urge all high-minded, valiant individuals to come forward with their donations to their brothers who have been the victims of war." Finally it suggests that all Egyptians can become active members in the society by collecting donations and sending them "to the treasurer in Cairo in return for a receipt as is the custom."

The search for crucial funding would be the society's major preoccupation, which is undoubtedly why *Al-Ahram* added its own appeal: "We hope all

Egyptians will hasten to participate and demonstrate those traits of generosity, human compassion and rectitude for which they are known."

In order to facilitate the collection process, the society organised two committees, one to solicit donations from "notables and dignitaries," and the other to "collect money from government departments from which many employees subscribe."

It is important to make several observations at this juncture. Charitable associations in those days were entirely dependent on donations; there was no concept of government funding or sponsorship. Perhaps this was due to the tight rein the occupation authorities kept on government reserves and expenditures. In the case of the Red Crescent, it might be because it was modelled on its sister organisation, the Red Cross, which also relied exclusively on donations. Yet, in Europe the capitalist system and a tradition of charity work were well entrenched, whereas in Egypt, these had only just begun to take root in the latter half of the 19th century. Thus, there is no comparison between the sums of money put at the disposal of the Red Cross and that available to its Egyptian counterpart.

At any rate, for some time, *Al-Ahram* continued to suggest that prospects were bright for the Red Crescent and that donations were pouring in. It was quite common to come across such articles as the following:

"His Eminence, Prince Hussein Pasha Kamel, the uncle of His Royal Highness the Khedive, has launched a donation campaign toward which he himself contributed 25 pounds. He promised that he would also enlist the support of other members of the royal family and said that many employees in the government ministries have already made large contributions which deserve the fullest gratitude."

However, it was not long before *Al-Ahram* began to reveal that the process was in fact an uphill drive. Three weeks after the donation campaign opened, the newspaper admitted that all that had been collected up to then was 312 pounds and 75 piastres. The sense of disappointment was expressed by *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Damietta who heatedly reproached those who had the means at their disposal for their reluctance to lend a hand to the new society. He wrote, "Egypt has never known a more praiseworthy society or one with a nobler and more just cause. It is everyone's lawful duty to assist, for justice cannot permit for a country to create an army if only a segment of the population contributes to its support." He concludes that, in the future, he hopes "to see the commendable zeal of our nobles and branches of the central committee extending throughout all the provinces in order to guarantee the success of this mission. God willing."

Gradually, news of the fledgling society began to disappear from the pages of *Al-Ahram*. Not only does it appear that the impetus of the initial fund-raising campaign dwindled sharply, but the incentive for the drive was soon dispelled by the final victory over the Mahdist forces on 2 September 1898, four months after the society was created. It would not be until another war erupted 13 years later that this impetus would be renewed.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Ukrainian delegation to visit Egypt

IN THE next few days, a Ukrainian delegation will pay a visit to Cairo with the aim of discussing means of enhancing trade ties with Egypt. Mohamed El-Arabi, head of the Chambers of Commerce Federation, stated that during the two sides' meeting, the economic reform programme in Egypt will be reviewed. For Egypt, the meeting will provide an opportunity to increase the potentiality of boosting Egyptian exports to the Ukraine.

MONEY & BUSINESS

NBE's leading role in fostering tourist development

IN LINE with the pioneering role in boosting real estate development, especially in the Sinai, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) participated in establishing Oriental Resorts for Tourist Reconstruction, according to Companies Law No. 159 of 1981. The company aims at establishing a project south of Nabq overlooking the Gulf of Aqaba.

The project includes a four-star hotel, chalets and villas with total capacities of 575 rooms in addition to other hotel services namely, restaurants, theatres, playgrounds, swimming pools, gyms, etc.

The company's issued capital totals LE300m distributed over 300,000 shares valuing LE100 each. NBE's subscription amounts to 24 per cent against 41 per cent

for Al-Ahly Co. for Real Estate Development, 25 per cent for Oriental Weavers Co and 10 per cent for Engineer Hussein Faek Sabour.

The company's headquarters shall be in South Sinai Governorate and the board of directors may establish branches, subsidiaries or agents thereof in Egypt or abroad. The term of office is fifty years starting from the date of registration in the commercial register.

In fact, NBE's equity participation has mounted to LE1.2bn covering 85 projects (including 12 tourist projects) as of 30 June 1995. The said projects cover various economic activities with total capital of LE10bn (of which tourist projects account for some 5 per cent).

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Egyptian-Saudi protocol

THE JOINT Egyptian-Saudi Committee held a 3-day meeting following *Ed El-Adha*. Amr Moussa, Egyptian foreign minister and his Saudi counterpart Prince Saud Al-Faisal, chaired the three-day meetings which sought solutions for problems facing Egyptian manpower in the Saudi kingdom.

The committee's agenda included facilitating procedures of issuing visas for expatriates' families, besides a discussion on the end-of-term payment, as some employers exercise pressure over their employees to forfeit either their half or full month end-of-term payment. The two sides also discussed means of removing barriers hampering free trade.

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A question of style

When the British Conservative Party suffered its second worst local election defeat earlier this month, no one seemed surprised — not even the Tories, who were quite content that their defeat was less than had been anticipated in opinion polls. The defeat, however justified, was a heavy one, strengthening the suggestion that the next British government — to be elected at any time within a year — will be a Labour one, led by the rising star of British politics, Tony Blair.

Conservative politicians have pointed out that the recent polls were held in England only, not across the United Kingdom, and that local election results do not necessarily indicate the pattern of voting in general elections. But such comforting wisdom has not drowned the fact that the Conservative Party faces the most serious challenge from the Labour Party since Margaret Thatcher led the Tories to power in 1979.

It is often claimed that the reason Labour has been making such progress lately is that it has abandoned its traditional left-wing rhetoric and embraced a centre-ground, non-ideological agenda. Labour today promises neither re-nationalisation, nor generous welfare spending, nor even to tax the rich as heavily as was once assumed to be fair.

But does this confirm — as Tory politicians tend to insist these days — the soundness of economic policies adopted by the Conservative government of the last 17 years? The answer is: not necessarily.

This is true that Britain is today the most appealing country in Europe for foreign investment. It is also true that it has the lowest inflation rate in Europe, that its unemployment figures are falling and that its currency is stable. But to think that these figures are all that is needed to win votes is precisely what makes the Conservative Party today seem out of touch and what puts Labour so far in the lead. The reality is that elections are no longer fought on traditional economic and social policy issues, but rather on style, image, approach and discourse.

British politics has traditionally been dominated by a struggle between the leftist Labour and rightist Conservative parties. Now, Ziad Bahaeeddin argues, political power does not even lie mainly with politicians

It was under the late Labour leader John Smith, who died two years ago, that the big transformation of the Labour Party began. The basic reason behind it was the realisation that the Conservative Party would not be defeated on economic argument alone and that traditional left-wing economic policies would only bring about another humiliating election defeat for Labour.

The swing in the electorate would occur, it seemed, when the voters were presented not with alternative economic policies, but with an alternative style of political leadership which used a modern discourse. If the votes were won during the 1980s on matters of efficiency and profitability, the votes of the 1990s were going to be attracted to an overall impression of trust and respect. And on these matters, the Conservative Party was vulnerable because, irrespective of the content of its policies, it had acquired the image of an old, uncaring, perhaps even decadent, party. Stories of corruption, sex scandals and excessive incomes involving Tory ministers would bring down the Conservative Party, not the privatisation of industries or the reduction in welfare benefits.

This does not mean that British politics has become void of context, nor that it has caught up with American-style public relations aethetics. On the contrary, the political debate in the United Kingdom is still vibrant, rich and as intriguing as ever. In fact, the change that occurred in the political debate is a sign of admirable maturity and sophistication. The emphasis is no longer on left-versus-right-wing social and economic policies. The debates are no longer on socialism versus capitalism, nor on the conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

Instead, the current emphasis is about how

society as a whole is viewed and how its problems are addressed. It is about the community versus the individual, conservation versus wasteful resource utilisation, European identity versus national pride, consumers versus producers, central administration versus devolved community powers; it is about the environment, the treatment of minorities and gender rights.

It is precisely for this reason that neither Labour nor the Liberal Democrats, Britain's third largest political party, see any benefit in declaring fundamentally new policies. What Labour in particular is really offering is a younger generation of politicians, who seem to be more caring, more sensitive and more trustworthy than their opponents.

The other, perhaps more dramatic, transformation in British politics today is the decline of the parties themselves. The trend is unmistakable: less people today vote in national elections, know about the parties' election promises or even care about them as they did before.

It would be tempting to say that this is due to a general feeling that politicians are not to be trusted and that the political game has become an exercise in hypocrisy and deceit. Tempting, perhaps, but untrue. British politics today is less tarnished than in most countries of the world and is even less so than it was itself some 20 years ago. If occasional scandals of corruption and misuse of authority keep troubling the current government, they are more than offset by a vigorous media and an independent judiciary.

So what is shrinking the importance of political parties? The answer is simple: parties and politicians are less interesting because the electorate has realised that they actually have

much less power than they used to and much less influence on public life than they claim.

Constitutionally, nothing has changed. Britain is still governed from parliament by the party with the absolute majority. But the power acquired by the media in the last few years has made journalists and editors often more powerful than members of parliament. Those with enough power to affect the financial markets — the fund managers, the brokers and the currency dealers — can wield more power and can influence the market more than the chancellor of the exchequer or the governor of the Bank of England.

Consumer societies, charity organisations and pressure groups are capable of stirring public opinion and seriously threatening orderly public life more than any single political party or trade union can. And unelected quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations) control a substantial amount of public funds. In short, political parties have become only one aspect of British political life, often overshadowed by more influential players.

Undoubtedly, party politics will remain at the centre of the British political system. But in Britain, as in the rest of Europe, there has been in the last few years a fundamental restructuring of society and a reformulation of the social and political values associated with it. Long-established elements of political interaction such as class, ethnicity, the urban-rural divide and national consciousness have evolved so much in the last 20 years that they make traditional political rhetoric a real anachronism. Eventually, there may be a return to traditional party politics, but only after the new centres of power have emerged and the new battle lines have been drawn. Until then, what happens in general elections may be dramatic, but will not be that significant.

Major's vision for Northern Ireland

BRITISH Prime Minister John Major told the Irish Republican Army (IRA) last week that the British government would not demand immediate IRA disarmament when all-party talks start this summer. Britain and Ireland maintain, however, that the IRA must restore its ceasefire if its political arm, Sinn Fein, is to be allowed to join in negotiations on peace and the political future of Northern Ireland that are due to begin on 10 June.

The IRA ended its 17-month ceasefire on 9 February with an explosion in London's Docklands area and followed it with a series of bomb attacks in the British capital. The resumption of hostilities indicated that Major had been stalling on the commencement of all-party talks since 1994. Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams has expressed his concern that the June negotiations will be merely a conference on IRA disarmament or decommissioning.

Major is under pressure to achieve a political solution to the Northern Irish problem so that he can give his ruling Conservative Party's re-election campaign a much-needed boost. Opinion polls place the Tories a long way behind Tony Blair's Labour Party

in the run-up to general elections which must take place some time within the coming year.

The following are extracts from an article by John Major which was published in The Irish Times on 16 May:

I want to see peace in Northern Ireland soon. So do the people of Northern Ireland. The road to an agreed and lasting settlement has been, and will continue to be, long and painstaking.

The last few months have seen encouraging progress. The all-party talks starting on 10 June are the first substantive negotiations since 1992. Meanwhile all the major parties, and many smaller ones, will take part in the elections in Northern Ireland on 30 May. The elections will prepare the way for the talks through the mandate to negotiate they give to the elected representatives.

Each successful party will choose its negotiating team from among its representatives. All the elected representatives will also be eligible to sit in a Forum designed to promote dialogue and mutual negotiations. The Forum cannot determine the course of the negotiations, but can make an important contribution in promoting dialogue between the parties and stimulating wider public involvement.

Once the elections are over, the route to the negotiations is clear, direct and automatic. And let me be absolutely clear about the British government's intention to ensure that these negotiations will be a genuine and serious effort to reach a comprehensive settlement, covering all the issues of concern and acceptable to all concerned. The purpose of the negotiations is arrangements for the future government of Northern Ireland, within a framework of stable relationships within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands, which can command the widest possible acceptability, accommodate diversity and provide for the necessary mutual reconciliation.

The British and Irish governments have made absolutely clear that they want all the parties in Northern Ireland to be at the negotiations. But they have made it just as clear that, without an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, Sinn Fein cannot take their place in the negotiations. The point is simple. All the participants in the negotiations must be able to show their commitment to exclusively peaceful means and to the democratic process. Sinn Fein cannot do so with any credibility if the organisation with which they are linked is continuing violence.

The British and Irish governments have agreed that all participants in the negotiations will have to make clear at the beginning of the talks their total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence. Decommissioning will also need to be addressed at the beginning of the talks.

This is a formidable challenge, among many other formidable challenges. But, like the others, I believe that it can be met.

European sceptics galore

The European Commission's recent publication of grim economic growth forecasts has shed renewed doubts on many countries' abilities to meet the three-per-cent budget deficit criterion for achieving the European Monetary Union (EMU) by 1999. "The average European Union (EU) growth this year may fall to 1.5 or 1.6 per cent — well down on earlier forecasts. The figures for next year will determine which countries join the single currency bloc," reported the *Guardian*.

For next year, the commission predicted a more optimistic average growth figure of 2.4 per cent — on the basis of which approximately half the EU member states would qualify for the EMU. The European commissioner for monetary affairs, Yves-Thibault de Silguy, said that France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Finland, the Netherlands and Denmark would meet Maastricht conditions, while Sweden and Austria would move closer to the target.

French President Jacques Chirac has become one of Europe's most vocal salesmen of the EMU. During a promotional tour of England last

week, he urged the government to jump on the Maastricht bandwagon because Britain, France and other countries required "a strong Europe, a Europe capable of playing its role in the world". And this could only be realised in a "Europe in which the voice of the United Kingdom is heard", added Chirac.

Despite Chirac's expressed confidence in monetary union, earlier French government attempts to reduce France's budget deficit by slashing social security met with political disaster last winter — provoking a wave of strikes that brought hundreds of thousands to the streets. At the time, popular resistance to the proposed austerity measures prompted senior EU officials to predict that the EMU's future could be decided on the streets of Paris. Commenting on the people's fury, Ignacio Ramonet, editor of the prestigious *Le Monde Diplomatique*, wrote: "Everywhere citizens are asking themselves what interest there is in building Europe on the ruins of the welfare state, on social regression?"

Undeterred by the last winter of discontent, French Prime

Minister Alain Juppé told parliament on 14 May that he intended to shed "layers of fat" from the civil service to cut the public sector budget deficit. Although Juppé did not disclose the specifics of his retrenchment plan, Finance Minister Jean Arthur said that he sought about \$11.55 billion in savings. And government sources mentioned the potential loss of 30,000 civil service jobs by the year 2000.

Venting his anger at the prime minister's remarks, former Socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius wondered whether Juppé was talking about policemen, nurses or teachers when he referred to "layers of fat" in the civil service. "May we respectfully ask the prime minister what he means by this elegant term?" Fabius blazed in the Socialist parliamentary group's newsletter.

The workers' response to Juppé's latest proposal, as well as to the EU's continent-wide privatisation and deregulation plans, was swift and to the point. Major unions organised a national 24-hour strike for 4 June to protest the projected partial privatisation of France Télécom, the public

telephone monopoly. The main trend. Germany has started "reducing salaries during sick leave" and other cuts are in view. Kohl has recently urged Germans to give up some of their privileges and cut down on all fringe benefits.

Among the G7, the world's seven richest nations, the United States alone has succeeded in reviving business and creating new job opportunities on a scale which has precipitated a drop in unemployment levels to 5.6 per cent. In both France and Germany, however, unemployment levels have reached 10 per cent. A recent article in the German press entitled "America: You are always the best!" advocated a "fitness programme" for the German economy.

In Germany, workers have already taken to the streets. Chancellor Helmut Kohl's decision to adopt austerity measures drew out more than 30,000 demonstrators last week and elicited hostility from the opposition Social Democratic Party. Despite such reactions, most European governments are determined to go ahead with policies aimed at reducing social costs. Even Sweden, where for many decades people have been accustomed to the government providing an array of social guarantees, has joined the

which governments are determined to adopt to make their countries meet the EMU criteria. German political experts recommend that the austerity measures, which invariably hit the working poor, should be designed to "avoid the French scenario" of social unrest.

The effects of such policies are quite conspicuous on the streets of cities like Paris, London and Frankfurt. Beggars on street corners and in tube stations are almost as numerous as in Third World cities. The ranks of the homeless and of people seeking shelter in churches and public buildings are swelling. This phenomenon is generally explained as being an outcome of the restructuring of industry, a process responsible for driving large numbers of unqualified workers out of the market and for closing down many uncompetitive businesses. Others interpret this phenomenon as a reckless exercise in profiteering without regard for any social responsibility. There is general scepticism about the future, and uncertainty about the possibilities for progress seems to dominate the attitude of

Refugees return to rejection

In recent weeks post-war Bosnia has witnessed a considerable number of potentially explosive incidents, as members of one ethnic group try to visit or return to homes now in the domain of former enemies. Under the Dayton peace accords, Bosnia-Herzegovina was divided into two entities, the Serb-controlled Republika Srpska and the Muslim-Croat Federation.

Peter Redmond, spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that there was no indication that tensions would subside so long as refugees attempted to exercise their right of return. "The situation has been escalating for the last three to four weeks. We had dozens of groups who wanted to cross the inter-entity boundary line but who were refused permission. Nine out of 10 requests have been blocked," he said. The UNHCR has been the leading agency responsible for the provision of humanitarian relief and the return of refugees, but the recent mass wave of returning refugees is turning out to be more of a security concern than anything else.

At the end of April, a group of Bosnian Muslims from Sarajevo went to visit the graves of relatives and friends in Tuzovo, a town to the southwest of Sarajevo in what is now Serb territory. Assured by foreign peacekeepers of their right to free movement, 500 Muslims set out towards their destination. Halfway between Sarajevo and Tuzovo, they were forced to the floor as the buses they were travelling in were smashed up with clubs and shovels. According to news reports, an elderly group of 30 to 40 Serbs began the assault and, after a while, a crowd of 200 to 300 Serbs were taking part. At least one Muslim was killed in the incident.

The buses were being escorted from Sarajevo by four or five NATO tanks when they were attacked. Serb police attempted to stop the assault, but the tanks personnel apparently did nothing to resist the assailants.

Redmond pointed out that, under the Dayton accords, NATO's Implementation Force (IFOR) has primary tasks and supporting tasks. The protection of returning refugees is one of its supporting tasks: freedom of movement must be guaranteed and a safe environment should be ensured for the refugees' return. IFOR is also required to respond appropriately to any ethnic confrontations. Redmond refused to comment on whether the UNHCR considered IFOR's stance near Tuzovo to be "appropriate".

Redmond was, however, quick to lash out at the Muslim, Croat and Serb authorities for not fulfilling

their obligations under the Dayton accords. He insisted that the Serbs were not the only ones blocking refugees' return, indicating that there had been similar incidents where Muslims and Croats had prevented Serb refugees from crossing into their territory. "All three sides have been finger-pointing, saying that the other group did not let their refugees in. It is becoming a vicious circle," he said.

Redmond mentioned that incidents had occurred in which returning refugees from all three groups had instigated ethnic unrest. "There have been instances of provocations and manipulations; for instance, people dressed in ethnic uniforms standing at inter-entity lines and waving flags and shouting provocatively at the people on the other side," he said, alluding to politicians who have been trying to gain popularity by playing the nationalist card. "But the bottom line is that the authorities must reaffirm their commitment to freedom of movement for all ethnic groups," he stressed.

The UNHCR, together with IFOR and the UN International Police Task Force, will cooperate with the authorities to coordinate better new arrivals of refugees. "One of the main problems at the borders is that when we try and let some of the refugees with permits through, the local authorities say that they have not received instructions from above. That's why coordination is so important," Redmond said.

The other families, hurt down or looted. The economic conditions are not encouraging, either. It is estimated that out of those who return in 1996, 830,000 will require UN humanitarian assistance. Forced repatriation from European countries has been discouraged.

Sadako Ogata, the UN high commissioner for refugees, said that no date had been set for the completion of the UN refugee protection operation. She affirmed, however, that a number of targets had to be reached beforehand, namely the implementation of the military provisions of the Dayton accords, the proclamation of a comprehensive amnesty for army deserters and those who left the country to avoid military conscription, and the establishment of local human rights monitoring mechanisms.

Redmond pointed out that a comprehensive amnesty agreement had not yet been agreed upon by all parties. Amnesty is a critical issue for returning refugees who fear prosecution by the authorities. As for human rights monitoring mechanisms which will deal with such matters as personal compensation claims and property dispute settlement, "the structures are in place in theory but they are still tenuous on the ground," Redmond said.

Initially, the UN had hoped that its temporary mission to protect returning refugees would finish between mid-June and mid-September this year, before general elections are held in Bosnia. It now seems probable that the elections will be delayed, since targets are not being met on schedule and the refugee crisis looks set to escalate. Guaranteeing freedom of movement for refugees is likely to remain the most contentious issue in the Dayton accords for the UNHCR and IFOR. "If we can't get 150 refugees across a border safely, how can we expect to return two million?" said Redmond.

Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

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10/10/1996

Yeltsin plays Russian roulette

RUSSIAN President Boris Yeltsin reiterated his determination this week to visit war-torn Chechnya, despite concerns for his safety. "No one but me can resolve the Chechen problem," he said. Yeltsin claims he is the only person who can bring the separatists, the Moscow-backed Chechen government and Russia to the negotiating table. Chechen rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbyev has said they have no plans to attack Yeltsin if he visits Chechnya, but warns that he cannot "give any guarantee of safety".

Yeltsin has claimed that Russian troops are not carrying out combat operations in Chechnya any more, but clashes are reported daily in the countryside and in the capital Grozny. Rebels say Dzhokhar Dudayev, the Chechen leader who declared independence in 1991 and died last month, was killed in a Russian air strike.

Yeltsin is running for a second term in the 16 June Russian presidential election against a strong challenge from Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov. The war, which began 17 months ago when Yeltsin sent in troops to end Chechnya's self-declared independence, is a major political handicap for Yeltsin and he is trying to show voters he is able and willing to end the conflict.

Central African revolt

FRENCH troops were this week trying to quell an uprising by mutinous soldiers in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. At least four people were killed when troops demanding control of their national army battled presidential guards in the streets. At least six people with ties to the government of President Ange-Felix Patasse were taken hostage.

National radio said that consultations were under way with army representatives to try to arrange talks with the government, but that there was no word on whether the rebels would agree to attend.

A French Foreign Ministry spokesman said the French troops were protecting France's nationals but did not plan to intervene in the conflict. French soldiers have, however, been stationed outside government buildings and along key streets in Bangui.

The uprising, which began on Saturday, was the second in two months in this landlocked, impoverished country that still bears the legacy of decades of corrupt dictatorships. Patasse was elected three years ago in the country's first multi-party elections, but is now under fire for failing to solve the economic problems left by his predecessors; soldiers and civil servants are both owed back payments.

China and US on the war path

THE US has announced massive trade sanctions against China, claiming that Beijing has failed to crack down on the pirating of American movies, records and computer programmes. The sanctions would impose 100 per cent import tariffs on \$3 billion worth of Chinese clothing and electronic products and would be the biggest ever clamped by the US.

Two days of talks in Beijing last week between Chinese and US officials ended with no apparent progress. According to US officials, the \$3 billion worth of imports to be targeted will be reduced to \$2 billion worth before 17 June, when the sanctions are due to take effect. US software, entertainment and other trade groups contend that Chinese piracy costs their members around \$2 billion annually.

US investors have warned that if the sanctions are enacted, thereby prompting a Chinese retaliation of even greater proportions, it would harm overall US business in China. Both Chinese and US businesses have called for efforts to avert an all-out Sino-US trade war.

War criminal bites the bullet

THE DEATH of Bosnian Serb General Djordje Djukic from cancer earlier this week cuts to 56 the number of people indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia for war crimes. Chief among them are Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb president, and the Bosnian Serb military commander General Ratko Mladic. Djukic, who was charged for his role in the Serb siege of Sarajevo, in which more than 10,000 people were killed, was released on health grounds when the court decided to forego a high-profile trial.

The full list of 56 is made up of 42 Bosnian Serbs, eight Bosnian Croats, three Bosnian Muslims and three officers of the former Yugoslav army. Five are detained in the Netherlands, close to The Hague where the tribunal is based, and two are being held in Sarajevo; the other 49 are still at large.

Karadzic, meanwhile, has deftly shifted some duties to an extreme nationalist ally, Biljana Plavsic, in a bid to stay in power after intense pressure from Western officials to resign. The man who led the Bosnian Serbs through three and a half years of war is regarded by international officials, who refuse to meet him, as one of the main impediments to implementing the Dayton peace accords.

Compiled by Heba Samir

Book review**African hunger**

"When the axe of the wood cutter is heard in the forest, the trees that are standing whisper to each other: Remember that the handle of the axe is made of wood!"

Michael Barrat Brown's *Africa's Choices* adds yet another voice to the chorus of voices condemning the World Bank's (WB) and International Monetary Fund's (IMF) policies for having caused economic as well as political and civil havoc in the South. In his study of the continent, Brown focuses on sub-Saharan Africa where the situation is particularly disastrous. To cover debt servicing, the bank required an increase in primary agrarian commodity exports, not only in Africa but all over the South — in a period of economic recession. This resulted in gross overproduction of often perishable merchandise, which led to a steep decrease in world market prices and the consequent collapse of the countries' export income.

The picture of the long-suffering African masses is well-known. "The people are not being fed. Township violence is endemic. Civil wars are spreading. National income overall failed to grow as fast as population in the 1970s and 1980s, and that included food production, which in many countries actually declined," writes Brown.

While many development specialists causally relate the outbreak of civil war to growing inequalities and the marginalisation of the poor, Brown presents a particularly strong case through his thematic explanation of the socio-economic origins of conflict — as evidenced by the debt burden. Worldwide, among the 41 states involved in short-term strife, two-thirds were seriously indebted in 1990-91.

Long wars are even more closely associated with indebtedness: of 27 states involved in war for more than a decade, three-quarters carry heavy debts. While warfare can evidently cause indebtedness, it is also true that the WB's austerity plans easily trigger violence and civil conflict. Hence, many civil wars erupted because of tight fiscal policy requirements leading to the dismantling of the welfare state, rising unemployment and class polarisation.

Brown cites Somalia and Yugoslavia as classic examples of countries where the

'Are they going to hang me?'

Were you aware of the size of the risk you were taking when you released the report on the Qana massacre committed by Israel against Lebanese civilians?

What are they going to do? Are they going to hang me in a square in front of the United Nations? Come on! I once met the president of Uganda, and with me was Egypt's ambassador to Uganda who was always complaining. I said to the president within earshot of the ambassador, "Mr President, if what I've said is not carried out, we will hang the ambassador." The Ugandan president said, "I've got no objection, only I don't want him hanged inside Uganda."

Don't you think that the report will affect your chances to be reelected for a second term as UN secretary-general? My reply is that I have not yet taken a decision to run again or not. This is for several reasons. One is that any move I make would be interpreted as campaigning. I therefore, have an interest in delaying the decision. Secondly, I have not taken the decision because I am hesitant since the UN is in a serious financial crisis. Member states owe \$2,300 million. Do you want me to work as an undertaker at the end of my life and lock up the UN's gates?

We are forced to make a thousand UN employees redundant this year. And, in addition to the financial crisis, there is a crisis in the budget. The UN budget was reduced by \$154 million, making it imperative to do away with one thousand jobs. It's lousy work. At one time they wanted to send me packing and say good riddance to me.

You have mentioned in interviews that you are formulating new ideas for the post-Cold War era. Why then don't you consider staying on at the UN and finishing something that you've started?

When I nominated myself for the post of UN secretary-general, I was 69, which gave me hope that I could help fashion the features of a new post-Cold War era. Today I say that this needs another 10 years at least. It's a difficult and long process.

I'll give you an analogy. After the end of World War II in 1945, no one foresaw the Cold War. On the contrary, the features of the Russian-American alliance were still in place. Together they set up an organisation — the UN. But in March 1949 NATO was founded and in 1955 the Warsaw Pact was signed. Then West Germany joined NATO. So the transformation happened. In the 10 years between 1945 and 1955, the world became polarised and the organisations which managed the Cold War were established.

Today we are living in a similar period of transition. New difficulties have arisen that did not exist before, such as today's technological revolution and the numerous types of globalisation: the globalisation of the economy, the media, the environment (as we saw after the Chernobyl disaster) and the globalisation of diseases and epidemics.

A case in point: it took syphilis 23 years to be carried from Latin America, where it began, to China. Today AIDS is transmitted in a matter of hours. Look at drugs and how they've spread; it's become an international problem. Terrorism has become an international problem as well, and was discussed by world leaders in the Sharm El-Sheikh Peacemakers Conference.

There are also new players on the world scene with influence on international policy, such as non-governmental organisations, multinational organisations and grassroots groups. It's as if the power of the state is diminishing and new leaderships are appearing.

We are in a situation similar to someone driving an old car at a speed of 40 kilometres per hour who has to repair the car as he is driving and catch up with a top-of-the-line car which is going at 120 kilometres an hour. Is it possible to catch up?

Some people believe that the technological

revolution helps us to face the new world order. In my opinion this is a fallacy. Each day brings new problems which we cannot resolve. For instance, eight years ago, when I was an official in Egypt, I said that terrorism was a worldwide problem and warned people of its consequences. And I repeated in France that terrorism was international. Who would have imagined then that some day somebody could simply make a phone call to announce the time and place of an upcoming bomb explosion. And this person might be calling from, let us say, Islamabad or some other place thousands of kilometres away.

Terrorists have access to a lot of money and they have international cheque books. This has given them terrorism, as well as drug trafficking, an international dimension that has changed their scope.

I want to see results and I want to contribute. In short, the matter needs time.

I would like to clarify a point in your position on the UN sanctions against Iraq. You have previously pointed out that sanctions should be aimed at the government rather than the people, but how can this be achieved?

We haven't really found a way out. The problem is still being researched. However in Haiti, for example, the international community found a way to address the problem. The foreign assets, belonging to the military dictatorship that was refusing to allow the peaceful transition to a civilian government, were frozen — and this proved to be effective. Moreover, the Haitian people weren't affected by such measures. Another successful form of sanctions was hit the military dictatorship with numerous travel bans.

What I am saying is that it is imperative to devise means to sanction governments without punishing the people. This is far from being easy and requires creativity. And we shouldn't forget that governments are by definition static and resistant to innovation and change. The UN is no different. Change is a slow and painful process. Therefore, sanctions continue to be applied in the same old way. Nevertheless, change is inevitable and the Security Council has discussed



the urgent need to seek new approaches. For my part, I tried unsuccessfully to promote my version of what I call "preventive diplomacy" which is comparable to a car insurance policy. Unfortunately, the world community is reluctant to implement anything like that. In this context, I often quote a Chinese proverb which translates as: It is always difficult to find money for medicine, but it is easy to find money for a coffin. This kind of behaviour defines the attitude of the world community.

I got tired of telling them that there was real potential for disaster in Burundi, comparable to the Rwandan genocide. I told them that we needed to draw up a "convention plan", that is a plan of action that would facilitate the quick deployment and intervention of our forces within two days, not two months, when and if needed.

Had this been put in place, we would only be faced with maybe 100,000 refugees instead of two million and instead of half a million people dying there might only be 50,000 victims. New ideas need time, not only within individual countries but also within the UN institution.

Is there a link between the sanctions imposed on Iraq, Libya and Sudan?

Speaking in a totally unbiased manner, I can say that sanctions were also imposed on Haiti and Serbia, as well as Cuba. It is true that sanctions are now exclusively imposed on Arab countries. However, if we think back historically, we have to remember that Italy and Germany were also sanctioned by having to pay reparation costs [to the Allies] after World War II. This means that sanctions aren't only imposed on Arab countries.

In fact, we Arabs continue to suffer from a persecution complex. We tend to perceive the world in terms of plots and conspiracies. This is understandable because of our common history of colonisation. Other Southern countries have the same problem.

In Egypt it is common to find people who will cry conspiracy at every turn. The assumption behind this attitude is that we are so important that others plot to control us and

Doesn't the large number of Third World countries in the UN and your presence as a representative of the Third World have any influence on the resolutions that are issued?

It's not enough. The crucial factor is the political will of a nation to play a role on the international scene. This political will is independent merely on the actual power of the nation. I'll give you an example of a country divided, torn apart and collapsed: Yugoslavia. Starting at the first summit conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in September 1961 and until the death of its President Tito in 1981, Yugoslavia played the role of a big power, because the crucial factor was political will.

Third World countries don't attach enough importance to foreign policy, which is what can influence resolutions. When you say that there is only one nation that has influence in the UN, I tell you that you're right. The truth is that other countries don't concern themselves enough with this international apparatus.

Russia should play its part in the international community. I've gone to Korea, China, Argentina, Mexico and Brazil and asked them to do the same thing. This way we'll come closer to international democracy.

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Reviewed by Faizah Rady

Al-Ahram Weekly

Sanctimonious sanctioning

Iraq's signing of the oil-for-food deal seems to have the international community grinning from ear to ear. The US's ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, heralded it as "an excellent day for the people of Iraq, who have not been able to get the requisite amount of food and medicine because of Saddam Hussein's priorities." Perhaps so, but just days before the agreement was signed, the US and Great Britain attempted to intervene in the negotiations, arguing that it offered Hussein loopholes through which he could redirect funds away from humanitarian relief and into the military. So why the sudden change of face?

One would hope that Iraq's post-sanction 40 per cent infant mortality rate would have played a major role in the decision. One could also hope that the reason is that six years of vice-like economic sanctions have done nothing more than leave the Iraqi population in a stranglehold. Unfortunately, more pragmatic political motives seem to be at root.

Topping the list of reasons for the US's about-face is the fact that high oil prices have become a heated campaign issue plaguing Clinton in his bid for re-election. Moreover, after enduring consistent pressure from the international community to reduce the sanctions, the US hopes that this partial lifting will remove it from the diplomatic firing line. And, providing more incentive was a part of the agreement which dictates that the UN will distribute supplies to the Iraqi Kurds, bitter opponents of Hussein's regime.

The simple truth of the matter, however, is that the sanctions did not work. They only served to infuriate the Iraqi population and cement Hussein's grip on power. The UN Security Council, minus the US and Great Britain, is now well aware of this fact and is unwilling to make the same mistake twice. Just last month, Russia, China and other countries refused to impose economic sanctions against Sudan for its alleged support of terrorism. It may have taken the world six years to stumble upon the realisation that sanctions will fail where negotiations will succeed, but for the Iraqi population, it was a lesson learned all too quickly and painfully.

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Against the inquisition

The debate which pits tradition against modernity, writes Ismail Serageddin, is not only technically and critically flawed, it is also counterproductive, locking advocates and detractors alike in a sterile, hackneyed contest

Consider the paradox of our times. We live in a world of plenty, of dazzling scientific advances and technological breakthroughs. Adventures in cyberspace are at hand. The Cold War over, we were offered hopes of global stability. Simultaneously, conflict, violence, debilitating economic uncertainties and tragic poverty are signs of the times. Many of the rich want to turn their backs on the poor. Selfish concerns seem to displace enlightened self-interest: we seem to have forgotten that we are all our brothers' keepers and we are all downwind or downstream of each other. This is more than ever a time for a united front.

The world is in the grip of profound contradictory tendencies. The forces of globalisation and homogenisation are definitely at work, while the assertion of specificity — ethnic, religious or cultural — is also powerfully present in almost all societies.

Globalisation is driven by the growing interdependence of the world's national economies, and the integration of the financial and telecommunications markets. The political boundaries that divide the sovereign nation states have become permeable to the ethereal commerce of ideas as well as funds.

A second important moving force behind heightened global consciousness is the environmental movement, which seeks to remind all humans that they are stewards of this earth.

A third force, significantly strengthened by the end of the Cold War, is the universal drive for the respect of human rights, a related and powerful aspect of which is the rise of feminism and gender consciousness. An essential ingredient of any true conception of human rights is that these must apply to all human beings.

Yet the local forces in practically every society continue to assert themselves and to seek greater power. This is on the whole a very

healthy development. But the downside of this phenomenon is the emergence of hateful petty nationalisms that transform legitimate calls for identity and participation into hatred of others and, ultimately, "ethnic cleansing".

Equally global are the increasing inequalities between and within societies. Insecurity fuelled by structural unemployment and rising burdens is the lot of the poor in every society. The loss of heritage and a sense of place, as pollution, poverty and urban chaos destroy the environment, robs a new generation of the opportunities to create a better world beyond mere shelter. The citizens of the world in general, and of the Arab world in particular, face the larger the new, the unknown — and feel profoundly insecure.

There is none of the optimism that once placed unbounded confidence in technology, and there is very real cynicism about the ability of governments to create any kind of utopia. In a word, there is a growing sense of unpredictability about the future. Under these circumstances, people tend to regress: if the future cannot be clearly defined as the goal, one lives for the present. If the present is troublesome and disconcerting, one falls back onto the past.

Precisely because the Arab world confronts these same forces in acute form, it has the opportunity to rise to the challenge and make a contribution, not just to the next Arab generation but to the world at large. Indeed, if we fail to make that contribution, the world will be the poorer for our failure.

We need to liberate the Arab mind, for it is in our minds that the new Arab renaissance will be created. It is the responsibility of intellectuals throughout the Arab world to liberate the Arab mind from the fear of intolerant fanaticism and state despotism, from the shackles of political correctness and the insecurities of being disconnected from a rapidly evolving world. The first thing we

must try to break is that sterile, tired and tiresome debate about modernity and tradition.

This hackneyed "modernity vs tradition" debate has overwhelmed our lives. In practically every forum dealing with contemporary Arab or Muslim societies, someone can always be counted on to frame the issues under discussion in the form of a dichotomous relationship between "tradition" (usually presented as harmonious and wonderful) and "modernity" (usually presented as alienating, dehumanising, and awful). Someone can also be counted on to immediately reverse the dichotomy, arguing that Arab or Muslim societies cannot live in the past and that modernity (here presented as science, technology, and progress) is the future.

I believe that this debate is not only technically and critically flawed (if not outright wrong), but that it is also highly unproductive and even counterproductive. The debate is unproductive because it usually leads to endless repetition and the marshalling of ever more examples and highly selective anecdotal evidence to buttress the a priori positions. The debate is also counterproductive because it tends to raise passions and make critical rational discourse even more difficult than it already is.

That this debate is technically flawed derives from the simplistic reductionism implicit in the dichotomous position. The rich tapestry representing the historical experience of the Arab world can never be reduced to a single "tradition" (or traditional position in the debate); nor can modernity — a complex, evolving concept that is highly relative and intertwined with contemporaneity — be conveniently circumscribed into a single definable reality applicable from Mauritania to Oman and from Somalia to Syria.

It is also critically flawed because it does not use the tools of criticism to expand our understanding of the issues involved. Without such an

increased understanding we are unlikely to progress beyond the repetitions, sterile litannies of this tired and tiresome debate.

Why not speak, instead, of method and approach? Let us recognise, for instance, that claims of cultural specificity which deprive women of their basic human rights, or mutilate them in the name of convention, should not be given sanction, especially by those who, like myself, are proud of their Arab and Muslim identity and do not want to see the essence of that tradition debased by such claims. Let us recognise that no society has progressed without making a major effort to empower its women, through education and the end of discrimination.

What the advocates of "tradition" are in fact defending, on the other hand, is a distorted form of political, pseudo-theological, "inquisition" that is being proposed, that would limit the freedom of the non-Muslim minorities and would circumscribe the Muslim majority within the confines of dogmas articulated by a tiny minority.

We need to respect tradition, integrate it into the present and use it as a foundation for building a better future; we need to fashion a critical approach which allows for the interpretation of tradition in contemporary terms, just as such great figures as the Imam El-Shafei did in their day.

We need, in fact, to create a new discourse, critical, open and tolerant of different views, which will be the basis for the creation of a mode of cultural expression — a new language that permeates the arts, letters and the public realm, that incorporates the new but anchors it in the old; a new language in which, in the words of T.S. Eliot,

"Every phrase and sentence is right, When every word is at home."

The writer is World Bank vice-president for environmental sustainable development.

Non-partisan peace

By Naguib Mahfouz

Peace in the Middle East is deemed essential by the international community. Peace is not a matter of personal preference, nor even of party politics. And it is well worth remembering, in the light of next week's Israeli elections, that the first peace agreement between Egypt and Israel was concluded not only with Likud but with its most hawkish leader.

The claim that peace will be possible with one Israeli prime minister and not with another is merely an example of election speak, even though it is undoubtedly true that the chances for peace with Peres in power are better, not least because he will have to rely on his American technological assistance. Another example is Jerusalem, where Israel can impose a formula that would guarantee its effective control over the entire city while conceding Palestinian "sovereignty" (an increasingly elastic term) over certain districts. In fact, the same pattern can be repeated in respect of all aspects of the settlement.

When all is said and done, however, it is to be questioned whether a peace process based on face-saving devices aimed at appeasing Arab public opinion, as opposed to one that seeks to genuinely respond to legitimate Arab aspirations, can succeed in uprooting terrorism. Especially when what is described as terrorism emanates from frustration, despair and a sense of helplessness in the face of an inexorable process towards an inequitable settlement that is clearly slanted in Israel's favour.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salamy.

What if Peres wins?

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed questions whether conditions for moving forward with the peace process are fulfilled, even if Peres wins this week's Israeli elections

On the eve of the Israeli elections, it is not surprising that practically all the Arab leaders have made statements to the effect that they do not favour one candidate over another, and that the choice between Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu is a purely internal matter. This common Arab position was reiterated by President Mubarak during his recent summit meeting with King Hussein and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

But whatever their public utterances, Arab leaders would prefer to see Peres reinstated as Israel's prime minister, and consider him, despite his undeniable responsibility for the Qana massacre, to be a lesser evil than his Likud rival. In a way, the wide Arab turnout at the Sham El-Sheikh summit, which included representatives of countries having no formal relations with Israel, was indicative of this trend. The participants were in effect declaring themselves against terrorism, whether by Hamas or by right-wing Israelis, such as Rabin's killer Yigal Amir, and underscoring their determination not to allow it to exercise a veto over the peace process. Netanyahu too is opposed to terrorism, but does not differ from Israeli terrorists when it comes to assessing the peace process, which, like them, he considers as capitulation to the Arabs.

Peres misinterpreted the tacit Arab support for his election as a license to eradicate Arab "terrorism" in all its forms, and went on from there to assume that the Arab regimes shared his view that the description "terrorist" fit not only Hamas but Hezbollah as well. However, Hezbollah cannot be branded a terrorist organisation —

whatever the Iranian connection — as long as Israel continues to occupy Lebanese territory in open defiance of a Security Council resolution.

Under the UN Charter, all resistance to foreign occupation, even by violent means, is legitimate. Even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that it is not, and that Hezbollah is in fact a terrorist organisation, and that, moreover, the national sovereignty of a UN member state can be violated with impunity, then surely Israel should have directed its Grapes of Wrath operation exclusively at Hezbollah activists. Instead, Israel deliberately targeted Lebanese civilians, as confirmed by the recently published UN report which concluded that the Qana massacre of civilian refugees was not, as the Israelis claimed, "a regrettable mistake", but a premeditated act.

Apologists

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Pyrrhic victories

At last, after almost a year of negotiations and manoeuvres — a real cat and mouse game — Iraq has signed an agreement for which the Iraqi people had starved waiting. Iraq has finally gained permission to import basic foodstuffs and medical supplies, to be paid for by the export of \$2 billion worth of oil every six months.

UN Security Council resolutions concerning Iraq never proscribed the import of foodstuffs and medical supplies, though the blockade and economic penalties levied against Iraq during the past six years were designed to drain the country of all its financial resources. The reasons behind such a policy were two-fold. Destroying the Iraqi economy was seen as a way of preventing any rearmament, while at the same time it was hoped that the Iraqi people would suffer to such an extent that they would turn against their regime. It does not appear that either of the two aims has been realised.

The penalties imposed by the US under the umbrella of the UN reduced the regime of Saddam Hussein to a hostage in America's hands. Yet in seeking to secure a free hand as far as Iraq is concerned, the US inadvertently turned the Iraqi people into hostages in Saddam's hand. Their suffering became his bargaining chip, and the more they suffered the more pressure he could exert on the UN, the US, and his Arab neighbours.

The US and Britain have made it a point to ensure that any arrangement with the UN would contain guarantees ensuring that no part of Iraq's oil revenue could be allotted to arms purchases or to any other security expenditure favouring the regime. America considers the agreement, details of which were being debated until moments before the signing, something of a victory. Yet Saddam Hussein could equally well consider the agreement a victory, even though one third of the forthcoming revenue is earmarked for the Kurds, for UN inspection teams and reparations.

This agreement marks the first step in lifting other sanctions imposed on Iraq. Once the UN inspection teams are in a position to vouch for the obedient acquiescence of the Iraqi regime, and once America agrees, of course, then we can expect a lessening of the blockade.

The food-for-oil agreement heralds the beginnings of a new international climate vis-a-vis Iraq. Already European and non-European economic delegations are making their way to Baghdad. Nor is it too far fetched to think that the Iraqi regime may well find ways to break through the Arab embargo imposed after the Kuwaiti invasion. In the meantime efforts made to undermine the Iraqi regime from within will increase, after the failure of the attempts to do pose it through outside pressure.

Having successfully shut Jordan's door to Iraq, America recently installed an extremely powerful broadcasting station in Kuwait, intended to beam its signals at both Iraq and Iran. The countries of the Gulf are being invited to participate in ever more costly security and defence agreements in the face of perceived threats.

All of this, in the end, boils down to one thing — a new chapter in the on-going saga of strife in the Gulf.

To The Editor**A matter of access**

Sir — It was a beautiful evening in Cairo on 31 March 1996, and my mother and I had been to a wedding at the Cairo Sheraton which had always been one of our favourite places; the staff were always very efficient and the food delicious.

Everyone was very happy for the bride and groom. The entertainment was a success because, as is always the custom in Egypt, the dancer encouraged all the young people to participate in the show and everyone had a wonderful time.

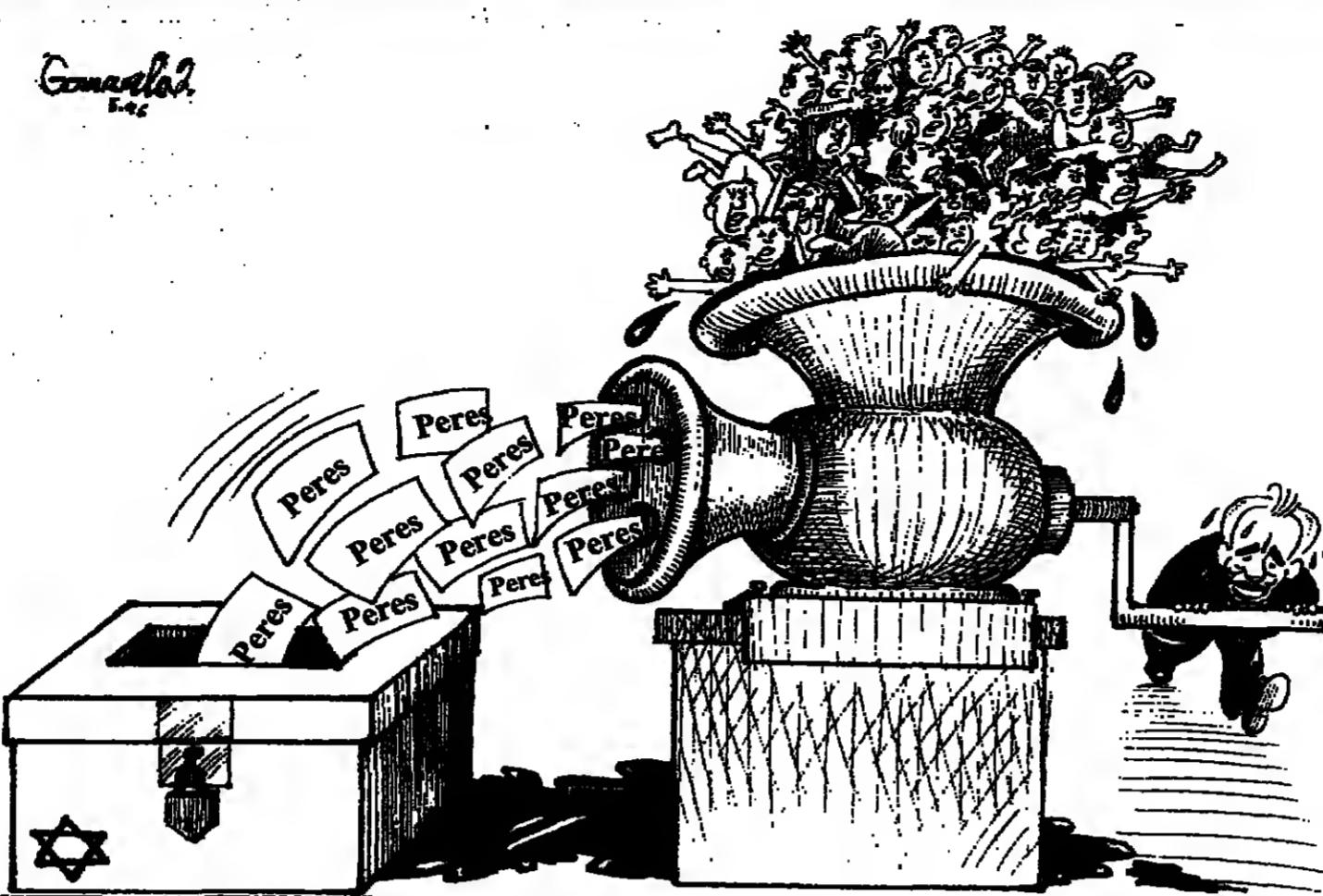
Around one in the morning, I asked my companion to take me to the ladies room; I couldn't get along because of my disability. When we reached the ladies room, we were dismayed to find that my wheelchair could not fit through the door. So, we struggled to get to the toilets.

I am one of the lucky people who can walk, or rather totter, with great difficulty and a great deal of help. At that time of night, it was a real agony after a day full of work and study. It must have been this great effort that gave me the initiative to ask to be shown to the manager's desk.

After explaining the situation, I asked bluntly "How can this be a five-star hotel without a toilet for the disabled? At that time of night, it was a real agony after a day full of work and study. It must have been this great effort that gave me the initiative to ask to be shown to the manager's desk."

The night manager smiled politely, but I could detect a hint of mockery. "Of

Ganster

**Beyond the politics of despair**

The rebuilding of Beirut, writes **Sadruddin Aga Khan**, can stand out as a symbol of continuity and rebirth

Archaeological digs have always generated controversy and specialists seldom see eye to eye. But plans for the future of Beirut may be just as divisive, if not more so, as discussions of the past and its remains. They are already the cause of a heated debate. I do not intend to take sides. My thoughts are with the innocent victims of the latest shelling. When will they stop paying the price?

My first contacts with Beirut go back nearly 60 years, when I used to visit my grandmother in Sofar where she kept a house during the summer.

In the seventies, I frequently stopped in Beirut, first as high commissioner for refugees and later as the UN secretary-general's special envoy. It was in that capacity that I had a taste of the war. My car was shot at by snipers who probably thought the UN flag was just right for target practice as I crossed the green line, driving from one ministry to another. I had to use a Lebanon air force helicopter, courtesy of the commander-in-chief of the Lebanon army, General Victor Khoury, to call on President Sardis in Baabda. I am grateful to the pilot, who seemed to know exactly where we should not venture. I will never forget the shattered glass and broken furniture in the president's office and the sound of heavy shelling as we discussed the situation, sipping Turkish coffee with Fouad Boutros, who was then deputy prime minister as well as defence and foreign minister. It was a Friday, 13 October 1978. The atmosphere was somewhat surreal — that was that of Lebanon generally.

During a recent visit to Beirut, I was told that those who had given land in exchange for shares (as opposed to those who purchased them) felt frustrated because their value had gone down. SOLIDERE was quick to recognise that they may have over-valued the land to begin with.

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I even heard that there had been some casualties. It seems that some people were still inside when certain structures were destroyed — surely not the best way for any construction company to gain popularity with the poor.

Some fear that reconstruction of old sites like the souks will become a pastiche of 19th-century Orientalism in the middle of a high-rise city resembling Monte Carlo or Singapore. You can't win them all. It is more difficult to rebuild a capital than to create a new one on barren land — like Brasilia or Islamabad.

Also, and more importantly, no one should forget that a whole generation of Lebanese grew up in a civil war which left 150,000 dead and over 200,000 maimed and wounded. At least 800,000 people were displaced abroad. Those who have returned since 1992 have been only partly absorbed through the extended family network. Such a disastrous confrontation could never have taken place had Lebanon not been divided by sectarian loyalties, compounded by economic and social disparities. This gave birth to an ideological divide without precedent before the war. In the 1970s, four per cent of the population controlled one third of the nation's wealth.

People who lived in the hinterland and the semi-rural areas — perhaps 80 per cent of the population — felt that they were considerably marginalised compared to those in the cities. This may not have been true, but the frustrated militias (Amal, the Phalangists and others) were recruited largely from the villages or the squallid shanty towns. Like the Palestinian refugees who had suffered so much and who remained generally destitute in an affluent capital, some saw the conflict as a way to "settle scores" with the Westernised, rich, sophisticated city people. Some may be tempted to compare the situation with the tragedy of Sarajevo, where "country" Serbs were killing not only Bosnians but also their fellow "city" Serbs in the besieged capital.

To what extent can SOLIDERE contribute to con-

tinence-building? It is, of course, only concerned with the master-plan not with the rest of Beirut. But what is done in the city centre cannot be divorced from the rest of the city or the rest of the country. A common problem with urban planning is that no one talks about the people. Social impact studies, however, are as essential as environmental impact studies. Economic growth does not stop violence if it accentuates disparities and sectarian divisions; unlike most countries which possess a majority, Lebanon is composed solely of rival minorities.

The work will proceed in two phases. The first objective is the completion of a built-up area of 1.4 to 2.5 million square metres by 1999; the second phase entails building up an area of 2.5 to 3.3 million square metres by the year 2009. A tentative third phase foresees an additional 1.1 million square metres by 2018.

Like any other project of this magnitude, and particularly because it is nurtured in Lebanon, there are many suspicions, reservations and concerns, all surrounded by endless gossip.

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The total built-up area of the SOLIDERE master plan approaches 4.7 million square metres. The project's main features include public and religious buildings, the preserved historical and archaeological core of the city, a financial district, an area of traditional souks, a mixed-use commercial, hotel and residential area, public parks and squares, marinas and a sea-side park and promenade.

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New highways cutting across town and leading



Little Angel, above, and Innocence, right: pret à porter images in imaginary landscapes



Rates of occupancy

A sainted place: Nigel Ryan gets lost in Fathi Hassan's Africa. But where exactly is it?

The Mashrabiya Gallery appears, on first entering, to be given over to vast spaces, almost empty plains sometimes black, sometimes acid yellow, red and pink. But these vast colour fields are not empty, there is a population of sorts, most frequently an elephant, though the black, nocturnal field contains a fox and the celestial blue an angel of sorts, in this instance a winged camel.

Nor are the spaces quite as simple as they first appear. The colour fields are carefully modulated. They are painted on cotton, which sometimes folds into deeper lines of colour, it is a residual landscape, at times carefully, precisely articulated. At its most successful the spaces through which the animals wander become expansive, a slightly tipped plain rolling forever towards an invisible horizon. In the least successful painting such space comes to resemble washed out denim.

Fathi Hassan, born in Cairo in 1957, has lived in Italy since 1979. His current exhibition at the Mashrabiya Gallery is titled Saint Africa. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition stresses the painter's Nubian origins, presumably to underline the African connection rather than play up other — perhaps less in vogue but equally wearable — identity, the Mediterranean.

It is to the south, then, that we go, to the sub-Saharan Africa of big game and girls in *caché*, a kind of cross between nature documentary and the *National Geographic*. In the smaller paintings, more domestic in scale and

therefore peopled, characters emerge, with earrings and amulets. There is *The Witch*, whose green hand ends in candle flames rather than finger nails, standing against a background comprising silver beetles in yellow lozenge shapes, a portentous harlequinade.

The figures, if less formalised than their backdrops, are no less ideogrammatic. Standing in front of squat minarets topped with crescents they have titles like *Innocence*. Or else they share their space with the omnipresent elephant. In *The Mirror of Bushma* a woman in a headdress that can fairly be described as exotic is busily cooling herself with a fan bearing the image of an elephant. Escaping such human bondage, in a singularly overloaded image, the same creature carries a palm tree in its trunk while turning its back on the human figure. Both man and beast are framed by a dome supporting not only a crescent but a cross and the six pointed Star of David. Fathi Hassan, on some levels at least, wants to do it by the book.

On entering the gallery the first painting you encounter, *The Quickly Disappearing Building*, has a cheetah, dramatically foreshortened, all disjunct legs in rapid motion, hurrying away from the yellow ghost of a skyscraper that floats in the dirtier yellow of the plain. It is a serviceable metaphor, easily read. Cheetah equals speed, a perfect piece of natural engineering. It departs a skyscraper that lacks the genes necessary for natural selection, and which therefore can never be entirely at home

even when it serves as home. Fathi's most serviceable metaphors, however, contrive to be rather more opaque than either the speedy big cat or the crescent surrounded by cross and star. The beetle is a case in point — historic little scarab that has crawled into Fathi's repertoire of images to be repeated here, there and everywhere. It scurries across the mirror in *The Mirror in Honour of Torkowski*. Quite why is anyone's guess, though quite why the torso of the figure in the painting is cut in two by the frame of the mirror, or why that torso should be portrayed sideways up, and against a background of stencilled green reindeer, is equally mysterious.

But it is the mystery in this exhibition that works. Those symbols easily deciphered are hardly worth the effort. The stencilled animals that stroll across the picture plane tend to be far less interesting than the representations of the plains they occupy, though their constant repetition can be a kind of iconic red-herring. The reindeer, after all, appear in four separate paintings, though my guess is that the frequency of appearance is dependent upon whichever animal stencil the artist had to hand rather than upon some intended symbolism.

If anything impresses it is the emptiness of the space juxtaposed by a single occupant. So where is this sainted place, the continent implicated by the title? The opacity of Fathi Hassan's most successful compositions suggests that

the continent operates here as an interior landscape, as a site waiting to be fixed, a metaphysical space that refuses, despite the hype, to resolve its identity. The spaces of Fathi Hassan's paintings are peopled by large animals and the dark-skinned, but only just. Fathi Hassan was born in Cairo, of Nubian descent. For the best part of two decades he has lived and worked in Italy, between Fano and Rome. The elephant, it is reported, never forgets.

At one point in his career Fathi was a calligrapher and a great many of these paintings contain calligraphic elements, though the actual script is unreadable. Even the word is reduced, made meaningless, by the space it occupies. Legibility gives way to an echo, to a distant memory of meaning.

At one point the unforgetting elephant strolls across a picture with a mosquito on its back. In others, by way of bridging the sea, the Arabic script of the large paintings is replaced by Latin letters, an arbitrary selection of outlines drawn from a tin stencil. But whatever the script the signifier refuses to emerge from the shapes. It is, like everything else, drawn in a space navigable only, perhaps, by a winged camel.

The animals, the beetles, the head dresses, amulets and the writing on the wall are no more than pret à porter costumes and accessories. Their wearers, like the wearers of other costumes, are lost in space.

Saint Africa is at the Mashrabiya Gallery. For full details see Listings.

MUSIC

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Great Symphonies No. 9; Dvorak, *Othello* overture op. 93; Rachmaninov, Concerto no. 2 in C minor for piano and orchestra op. 18; Sergey Glavatskikh (piano soloist); Tchaikovsky, *Monfred Symphony*, op. 58; Ahmed El-Saeid, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House, 17 May

And they were Russians. Rachmaninov was 20 when Tchaikovsky died. Meet or not meet history has smudged the later part of the 19th century for them. But the establishment, the marketplace they were born into, was the same. Their way of managing it to suit their own particular genius was, however, different. Two paths to tread, they passed into myth by different routes, but came together in this concert, causing the same bewilderment they always do — troublesome, but vastly alluring.

On this night Rachmaninov came first. He was the virtuoso who got away. He had more than genius — he was an event, a mysterious explosion of personality so strong it annihilated everything else around it. There he was in front of you — so tall, withdrawn, and apparently disapproving, even contemptuous. Thoughts came — why bother to play at all if you feel like this about it? After all, he was a composer not a circus performer, as he said. But such questions have no answer. He was driven to play as he was to compose, and that was it. How he played, how he delivered the messages of the music, is part of the legends of the 20th century. No one ever did anything like him, except maybe Liszt. Anywhere, there can be no doubt that he would have played his no. 2 concerto not at all like Sergey Glavatskikh did.

Glavatskikh has been here before and always causes a sensation. Tonight was no exception. His strength is mostly hidden by a deceptive, withdrawn confrontation with the music played. His speeds are terrific, his tempo exact — a delight. He never, for even that fraction of a split moment, hesitates. He is there, the notes fly out like sparks of fire and ice with total precision. The programme tells us this concerto is in three movements:

Time to go

David Blake follows forest footprints

big players usually overlook this. A charge-on-delivery of a piece which looks seamless is what Glavatskikh did. There was moderate, then rapid, then hushed majesty, then really fast majesty, then always majesty.

Ahmed El-Saeid has presented the *Monfred Symphony* before. He always catches the spirit, indecision, sudden terrors overcome, the gallows' humour and even the pathetic freshness of the first two movements. El-Saeid takes his time. Pause, he says, listen and pause. Anyone can find himself in such a position as Tchaikovsky. There is a lot of *Monfred* after Byron — orgies, Christianity, paganism, moonlight goddesses leading crusading knights to the devil. Everything is in this symphony. Monfred wanders on into the dark with no return. So did Tchaikovsky who, like Rachmaninov, escaped. Rachmaninov escaped behind a mask. Tchaikovsky into the ultimate mystery of his death.

Cairo Opera Ballet Company: The Cairo Opera Orchestra; Cleopatra Ballet and El-Nile Ballet; artistic supervisor Abd-el-Moneim Komel; conductor Taha Nagui; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall; 20 May

The Cleopatra myth needs a new spin. Difficult to make an exciting ballet out of her life. Being Egypt's most succulent myth, she can withstand almost any treatment, except that all the shots taken of her in this ballet miss their mark. Cleopatra was almost anything except a non-starter which in this ballet is her destiny.

This version of Cleopatra might almost pass muster in a provincial foreign theatre. But in Cairo, in Egypt's national Opera House, her naif stamping ground, it is more than embarrassing to see a

pale wimpish lady floating about in filmy gold coat and doing nothing. She doesn't even know people.

There have been two important attempts at a Cleopatra ballet in this century, both of them before 1910, both coming to nothing. Their creators were Bakst and Poiret, the latter the first grand couturier to change women's fashion. He freed women from the tyranny of the corset.

Ballet being wordless can be understood anywhere if it keeps in the clear and sticks to well-defined narrative situations. This new arrangement offered no new takes on the Cleopatra situation, political, moral or sexual. Even the CV of the serpent of old Nile was missing. No characters, no drama, no confrontations. Everything moved around in a void.

Cleopatra's court was highly decadent and far removed from ordinary life. But the all-important tale, the history of mispent ambition, mad explosive egos and the worship of the senses were missing in this show. And worse, the scenario lost the performers.

Nothing to understand. Enjoy the dress, Erminia Kamel looked frail, a delicate siren. She seems to have been put into the ballet to exhibit her lovely, air-borne pas de bourse — no panther of the water front. Sergey Gorbachev has grown taller during his absence, and lighter. His jumps impressed, but he looked too healthy for a besotted Antony. The all important Octavian, future Emperor Augustus, was erased from the story. Roman legions, rather than this awesome presence, brought the fatal letter to the lovers — Antony back to Rome, toes on the line. He goes. The queen goes berserk. She does a dance with a serpent, it takes the fatal nip, and she does a dance with a miraculously materialised Antony before dropping dead. Believe it: this is the end. No Octavian, above all, no Actium, thus removing the kernel from the nut.

And the music? Not easy to dance to waves of constant harp arpeggios. Who was to blame for this? Mostly Vladimir Vladimirov, billed as librettist and choreographer.

With a contemporary production and something new to say, Cleopatra might have come out of the wax works alive.



Cleopatra — non start, no go

such a situation was positively wounding — a vicious slice of the seythe blade through his very being. And he had to face it more alone than most. One look at the rest of Tchaikovsky's brothers resting their judicial feet around the family table is enough to give the decently insane to suicide. One of the re-

To begin we were in Alexandria which looked like Canaletto's Venice. Centre of the picturesque decor was the Pharos — the great projection, phallic-shaped, rising from a dazzling blue sea. It resembles San Marco completely, thus throwing any placing of the story. There was a certain grandeur to the stage movements of the dancers and the principals who selflessly performed what shreds of realism they were offered. The corps de ballet, male and female, were handsome, willing and high-dressed. The lighting was richly amber and the costumes as in all the Opera Ballet's productions, were beautifully tailored and fanciful without being impractical.

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FILMS

Lamiae

El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza, Tel 340 6861, 29 May, 3pm, 3pm & 9pm. Cairo Sherman, El-Gamal St. Giza, Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Broken Arrow

Karin II, 15 Emadoddin St. Downtown, Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm & 9pm. Cairo Sherman, El-Gamal St. Giza, Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

GRACEFUL

Nazih Rashid Hall, Cairo Sherman, El-Gamal St. Giza, Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Reviewed by Magwa El-Azizli

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Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Fathi Hassan (Paintings) Mosharabiya Gallery, 8 Cheminot St., Downtown, Tel 778 623. Daily Fri, 11am-8pm, until the end of the month.

Moust El-Shaarai (Calligraphy) Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim El-David St., Downtown, Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 24 May.

Le Cliffs Inquiries (Photographs) Indian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsaf St., Zamalek, Tel 340 8791. Daily 1pm-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 May.

Student Exhibition Everett Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St., Zamalek, Tel 347 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-9pm. Until 31 May.

Maged Abdels-Aziz (Paintings) & Hassan Osman (Sculptures) Extra Gallery, 3 El-Messini St., Zamalek, Tel 240 6293. Daily 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 31 May.

Sayed Saadeldin (Paintings) & Mohamed Mandour (Ceramics) El-Messini El-Khalil, 18 El-Messini Mohamed St., Zamalek, Tel 340 1349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 31 May.

Restoration El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Giza, Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-1pm. Until 31 May.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Abdel-Debab

38 Talaat Harb St., Downtown, Tel 574 5656. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. El-Gamal I, 26 July St., Downtown, Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sterling Ahmed Zaki and Raghdha.

Robert Gotowski (Paintings) Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr. Ibrahim Amara St., Zamalek, Tel 340 0976. Daily exc Sun, 1pm-3pm. Until 7 June.

Minatures Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherif Sherif St., Downtown, Tel 574 5656. Daily 10am-1pm, 3pm-5pm. Found Selim and Mehemet El-Razzaz for the inauguration of the gallery.

Ingrid Gater (Paintings)

Corniche 1, 12 Emadoddin St., Downtown, Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St., Emadoddin, Downtown.

EL-Nasr Film Assal (Sound Asleep)

Cassinos 1, 12 Emadoddin St., Downtown, Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Directed by Suguru Kubota (1992).

Karin II, 12 Emadoddin St., Downtown, Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Directed by Selim Sabah.

Clarinet Recital Small Hall, Opera House, as above.

Eric-Saxie, 24 May, 9pm.

Ithnaas Chamber Orchestra Main Hall, Opera House, as above.

24 May, 9pm.

Eric-Saxie (Concerto)

Main Hall, Opera House, as above.

25 May, 9pm.

Eric-Saxie (Piano Concerto)

Main Hall, Opera House, as above.

26 May, 9pm.

Eric-Saxie (Violin Concerto)

Main Hall, Opera House, as above.

27 May, 9pm.

Eric-Saxie (Double Bass Concerto)

Main Hall, Opera House, as above.

28 May,

In the can

Mohamed El-Assouly
examines one of the few films
to have made it to the screen
this year and provides clues
as to why much is a
muchness in the world of film



Confused publicity: Ahmed Zaki defends Raghda in a publicity shot that contradicts the released version of *Abul Dahab*

Those filmmakers lucky enough to have pulled productions together last year were — more often than not — a little blasé about the long running and much publicised crisis afflicting the Egyptian film industry. Well into 1996 though, they may have cause to regret their earlier optimism. Alarming few of them have so far managed to secure commercial release for their films and for the past twelve months the fruit of their labours has remained firmly in the can.

The majority of films that have made it to movie houses since the new year are the very same low budget, flatly commercial productions that many had hoped to see squeezed out of the market. Of the nine productions that have dominated cinema screens so far this year, only one, *Leila Sakha* (A Hot Night), was ready for screening more than 12 months before its release. The rest, including, of course, Adel Imam's *El-Naw*, *Fil-Assal* (Sound Asleep), had simply reserved movie theatres before the first day of shooting.

So far this year we have seen nine pictures in five months. Out of these nine, two starred Ahmed Zaki and Raghda, a cinematic duo whose partnership dates back to 1990, the year that saw the release of both *Kaboria* (Crabs) and *El-Imbator* (The Emperor). The first was an unexpectedly humorous film from Khairi Bishara, a director whose first four films, while finding favour with critics had done little box office business.

Kaboria featured musical sketches and humorous fights. Ahmed Zaki played an unemployed boxer hired by a monstrously rich couple as entertainment during their extravagantly luxurious parties. *El-Imbator*, effectively a version of the 1983 film *Scarface*, was directed Tarek El-Ezaz's debut film. Despite some censorship cuts it managed to please both audience and critics.

The two Zaki-Ragha vehicles released this year are an attempt to capitalise on the duos earlier success. The producers' eyes, however, have focussed rather more closely on the box-office than on critical acclaim.

Has El-Deghdidi's Itakaza (Lobsters), written by Abd El-Hai Adib and based on *The Taming of The Shrew*, was released last February. The scriptwriter and director co-produced the film, criticised for its heavy handed use of bikini clad Russian belly dancers who appear in almost every frame. Indeed, the raison d'être for so many scenes occurring on the beach seems to have been to provide a backdrop for as much undressing as the censor ship would allow.

The publicity for Ahmed Zaki's second vehicle, *Abul Dahab*, released in 15 theatres for *Eid El-Adha*, stressed its commercial rather than critical appeal: "Our film is not nominated for any prizes," "A return to sweet cinema without all the sophistication," "A solid gold film," "A film you'll watch from seven to nine times." Amid all the blurb's the director's name shrank until it was prac-

tically invisible in the corner of the publicity materials following well-publicised wrangles with the producer.

Samir Abdel-Azim, who earned his reputation writing radio-series which he subsequently turned into films and occasionally soap-operas, is the scriptwriter and producer of *Abul Dahab*. His credits include *Asewah Wa Arameb* (Open Mouths and Rabbits), *Ala Bab El-Wazir* (At Bab El-Wazir) and *El-Sab Fel-Mallahat* (Patience in the Salt Lake). In adapting his radio-series *El-Imbator Abul*

Dahab (The Emperor Abul-Dahab) for the big screen Abdel-Azim followed a path he has trodden before. His technique is simply to take individual episodes from the radio series and string them together into the required length, without any linking footage, transitional dialogue or plot change, the one innovation of the film script being the inclusion of endless sexual innuendos:

Abul Dahab is released from prison after serving a sentence in fact of his employer, who had been selling underweight loaves of bread, only to find that the said employer had reneged on his agreement to pay a monthly allowance to Abul-Dahab's wife and child. As a consequence of this oversight Abul-Dahab storms into the bakery, knocks his employer about a bit, before burying him in dough. Unfortunately Ahmed Zaki cannot quite hide his amusement at the denouement of the bakery scene. The cameras keep on rolling as he chuckles and his character's motivation disappears into thin air.

Abul-Dahab's job-hunting goes on for quite a few minutes. Lack of success leads him to fall into a depression counterpointed by a strangely cheerful soundtrack of Ahmed Zaki singing happy songs. This unique case of schizophrenia makes for a viewing experience similar to watching animated Russian pictures.

Once upon a time the Egyptian cinema attracted the cream of the literati. During the 1950s and early '60s, as national consciousness peaked, the names of Naguib Mahfouz, Youssef El-Seba'i, Ehsan Abdel-Qoddous, Abdel-Hamid Gouda El-Sakkhar, Amira Youssef

Ghorab, Sarwat Abuza, Galil El-Bendari, Fahmi Abul-Fadi and Youssef Ghori could be found in the credits, as they either scripted films, or adapted their own novels and short stories for the big screen.

It is a phenomena that by the early '70s had all but ended. Hardly any novelist or playwright tackle screenplays today. Yet the constant recycling of a few basic plots suggest that imaginative screenwriters are what Egyptian cinema most lacks.

All those film stars deemed box office draws, male and female, have either passed the half century mark or are approaching it at speed. Yet the big screen's need for fresh new blood exceeds by far the craving of any vampire locked up in his coffin for centuries.

Egypt's top superstar is still playing the same characters he did since 1966: same looks, same age, same grimaces...there is minimal difference in either performance or character.

The most significant development has been Adel Imam's ever increasing centrality and indispensability to the plot — or, as is sometimes the case, to the movie, even in the absence of a plot.

On average the budget for a film in Egypt is LE700,000, a figure that would not cover the salaries of the make-up personnel on a big Hollywood production. The lion's share of this figure goes to the stars acting in the film who, by virtue of their long years playing secondary roles finally deserve some money to secure their sometimes ill-concealed old age. Yet inflation, and the law of diminishing returns, means that even superstars can die in penury. The silver screen loves youth. Fees appear to have an inverse relationship with experience. The older you get, the less they pay. In the worst cases actors are eventually forced to accept any role to appear on the screen again. And any screen will do, even if it is only a few inches wide.

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On average the budget for a film in Egypt is LE70

Fountain of youth or sleeping pill?

Do you want to live longer, look younger, healthier and more? Nermene El-Nawawi investigates claims that we now have a wonder pill that does it all

Egyptian pharmaceutical companies are now producing locally the new drug, melatonin which for the past few months has stirred a more than vivid interest among many sections of the population. Previously imported privately it has now been commercialised under the brand name Vivamax Melatonin, and is available in pharmacies at a cost of LE15 for every 30 capsules. Tested independently in Egyptian laboratories, the drug has earned high ratings.

Originally manufactured and tested in the US, it has been advertised as the new fountain of youth, extending normal life span by 25 per cent or more and injecting elderly people with renewed health and boundless energy. The old could now enjoy once more a full, active life with the same zest and vigour as a forty-year-old spring chicken and with no harmful side effects or long-term dangers to worry about. In the US however, melatonin is registered with the Federal Drug Administration as a nutritional product, and therefore sold over the counter, whereas in Egypt it is produced as a prescription drug, said Dr Gamila Mousa, under-secretary of the Ministry of Health for pharmaceuticals. Mousa confirms that the drug now distributed in Egyptian pharmacies has the same composition as the tablets made in the US.

But what exactly is melatonin? We are told it already exists in its natural state in every living substance, from algae to human beings, and plays different roles in the human body. It has been isolated and its effects studied on animals and humans, albeit not yet sufficiently, insist some scientists.

According to the 1996 World Health Network report, providing mice and rats with a supplement of the substance has been shown to enhance their health in a surprising number of ways. The report also suggests that determined dosages can stop or retard the growth of human breast cancers and induce tumor regression if used in conjunction with chemotherapy.

"By playing an important role in the regulation of the sleep-wake cycle, melatonin induces sleep without the side effects of sedatives and other sleep aids," says Dr Mohamed Ghaneem, professor of psychiatry at Ain Shams University. It reduces the time it takes to fall asleep, increases actual sleeping time and reduces the number of awakenings after the onset of sleep, he explains.

Among the functions of melatonin listed by the World Health Network report is that of efficiently combating jet lag because it resets the body's biological clock. In addition, it may prevent heart disease by lowering blood cholesterol. New research suggests that it could be effective in the treatment and/or prevention of AIDS, Alzheimer, asthma, cataracts and diabetes. "The combination of large doses of the drug (300 mg) with progesterone inhibits ovulation in females, without the unpleasant side-effects of conventional estrogen-containing pills," claims Dr Hisham El-Gayar, professor of endocrinology and internal medicine at Ain Shams University.

In addition, according to the World Health Net-



photo: Sherif Sonbol

work report, the substance acts as an intercellular antioxidant, preventing and reducing the damage done to the body by free radicals, thereby protecting every part of the cell and every cell of the body, including vital brain cells.

Referred to as "the hormone of darkness", melatonin is secreted by the pineal gland, a small organ situated behind the eye, weighing 100 - 150 mg. Pharmacist Mahmoud Ghourib, chairman of the Giza Pharmacists Syndicate, sheds light on the composition of the substance and its role in the biorhythms cycle: "[It] is composed of an amino acid called tryptophan, which we get from the food we ingest. Tryptophan is then converted into serotonin, a brain chemical involved with mood, which in turn is converted into melatonin.

"We get our high energy level from serotonin during the day and our restful sleep from melatonin at night," he says. Moreover, according to Dr Hussain El-Orabi, professor of endocrinology at Ain Shams University, it has two other vital functions:

it is responsible for hormonal regulation and for providing antioxidant protection.

The pineal gland gives orders to other systems through the release of melatonin: changes in its levels inform the body, inducing it to enter puberty, begin the sleeping or wakefulness processes, alert it to produce antibodies. Therefore, the pineal gland acts like an orchestra conductor, using the substance as its baton.

Melatonin production occurs almost entirely at night and is actually stimulated by darkness. "The onset of secretion is around 9 - 11 pm and the offset is between 7 - 9 am," El-Gayar says. When light hits the retina of the eye, neural impulses signal the pineal gland to slow the production.

Melatonin is secreted abundantly until puberty, and then its levels decline steadily into old age. As soon as the pineal gland senses we're old, around the age of 45 it begins to reduce its production, signaling to all other systems that it is time to start the aging process. If at the age of 40 we could attain the levels that we had in youth, the pineal gland would continue to give orders appropriate to a young body. Chronologically, we'd be entering middle and old age; biologically, we'd still be young. Ghaneem is sceptic on that count, however, claiming that the anti-aging characteristics are an illusion more in the nature of wishful thinking: "The drug is only capable of improving the quality of life," he says.

Dr. Russel Reiter, professor of neuroendocrinology at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center and "godfather of melatonin research" discovered in 1993 that melatonin is the body's most crucial antioxidant. This is clearly illustrated in his major book, on the topic, "Melatonin: Your Body's Natural Wonder Drug".

Reiter reports that there are no human studies to support the contention that it will really extend normal people's lifespan, although it has caused a 20 per cent increase in the lifespan of both rats and mice. "If melatonin allows you to live longer, it may be due to its proven ability to reduce free radical damage, stimulate an aging immune sys-

tem, protect the cardiovascular system and stimulate the production of growth hormone," Reiter emphasises.

One of the key glands stimulated by the substance is the thymus, full of the white blood cells which fight infection. In response to decreased levels, the thymus shrinks and disappears. Melatonin also seeks to counter the immunosuppressing effects of the stress hormone, which causes us to get sick when we're under pressure. That may be why younger people seem better able to handle high-pressure jobs or demanding schedules, says Ghaneem. He has not found it effective in the treatment of brain damage and mental disorders, however.

Researchers are still indecisive about the optimum doses to be prescribed in each of the different conditions which the drug is alleged to treat, because the same dose can produce different blood levels in each particular case. Yet, most physicians suggest that starting with a 2 or 3 mg dose one hour before bedtime is sufficient for inducing sleep, alleviating jet lag, combating the aging process, affording antioxidant protection and assisting immune therapy.

Ghourib advises patients to stay away from "natural melatonin" because it might be contaminated with viruses and proteins which could evoke an antibody response. "Synthetic melatonin, on the other hand, is made from chemicals identical to that produced in the body," he says. Although the synthetic variety is available in three different preparations—regular, time-release and sublingual—time-release tablets are the best choice: "They allow the drug to enter the bloodstream more gradually, which enables patients to take a low dose and still have it in their bloodstream throughout the night," Ghourib explains.

Regular tablets cause the substance to enter the bloodstream rapidly and sublingual ones most rapidly, producing much higher levels than normally present in the body.

To date, the drug has not caused problems to its users. Reiter suggested in his book that patients taking 6 grammes in carefully monitored studies showed no signs of toxicity. "The only consistent side effect of high doses has been drowsiness and a slower reaction time," Reiter explained. Moreover, the Food and Drug Administration reports that in the two years it has been available over the counter, no alarming negative side effects have been reported. Reiter, however, declares that although melatonin has been tested on humans in hundreds of studies, it has not been administered in the large-scale, carefully controlled studies necessary to determine its ultimate safety. "People who choose to take it at the present time are facing some unknown risks," Reiter said. El-Orabi shares the same view: "There are no extensive clinical trials on humans to rely on, no purity controls, standard dosing regimes or long-term evaluations."

The 1996 World Health Network report confirms these opinions: "The immense popularity of melatonin has brought with it some unbalanced and potentially dangerous views on the hormone as there are no conclusive human studies that guarantee any positive long-term results," it says. "Through personal experience and communication with a large number of physicians who have treated patients with melatonin, its only proven safe use is as a short-term remedy for jet lag and sleeping disorders," adds El-Orabi.

People under 45 already manufacture adequate amounts of the substance, and supplementation should be avoided except for short-term use. "Melatonin is a promising hormone but more time is needed to verify fields of use and safety of pharmacological doses which greatly exceed its physiological natural daily secretion," El-Gayar explained.

According to Dr Raafat Raghwani, professor of endocrinology at Cairo University: "Scientists do not know everything about the substance as a natural hormone in the body, and thus cannot decide firmly on an artificial form."

Side effects are also not to be taken lightly: The World Health report that some people find it more difficult to sleep when taking melatonin and experience nightmares. Others report mild headaches, stomach upsets and feelings of depression. Most of these effects, however, occurred in people who took high doses of melatonin, were chronic users or were on medication. Reiter suggests that it worsened depression in some people, although others experienced relief from the symptoms. In this respect, Ghaneem suggests that the following people should not take supplements without the supervision of a physician: normal children; pregnant women and nursing mothers; and people with severe mental illness, allergies, auto immune diseases, leukemia and lymphoma.

Surprisingly, hundreds of thousands of people have decided not to wait for further studies and have begun to take the drug.

Raghwani started taking the American drug three months ago. He reports that he has been sleeping more deeply and for longer hours; he also reports a generally healthier appearance. Raghwani, who has been suffering from constant migraines since 1958, has had none since he started taking melatonin. It has also regulated his heart palpitations.

A second patient, Essam Khamra, has been taking the American brand of the drug for the past four months. Khamra reports that its most important result is a deep and relaxed sleep. Taking it also helped Khamra become less nervous and more tolerant to stress. He finds, however, that he sleeps for longer hours than expected.

A third patient, May Zeid, took Egyptian melatonin for ten days. Zeid reported that it caused her to be more alert. "I used to sleep for a couple of hours, wake up and stay up for the rest of the night," Zeid said.

Most physicians interviewed by the Weekly said that melatonin's commercial publicity has exceeded its scientific benefits. "The effects of such drugs cannot be studied through intensive propaganda campaigns," says Dr Yehia El-Rakabi, professor of psychiatry at Cairo University.

Destiny rides the metro

Whenever the conversation with foreigners turns to why they love Egypt, one is sure to hear a speech on how hospitable and kind-hearted Egyptians are. I never fail to point out the absence of gory crimes in our land. We are definitely not an aggressive, cruel people, but what exactly is meant by "kind"?

For me the word often conjures up images of our greengrocer, who for the past ten years has imposed extortionist, monopolistic prices in our neighbourhood with a debonair smile. His is the kindness of a Mafioso collecting protection mon-

ey. The other day however, I had a chance to observe first-hand what Egyptians' kindness consists of. I was riding the metro late in the afternoon. I noticed a group of smartly dressed young women chatting excitedly. It soon became obvious that they were on their way to attend some family celebration, at which a certain young man would be present. The young man, Hussein, had apparently expressed interest in one of the girls of the group, Sumaya. She was supposed to make a decision as to whether she liked him or not. Sumaya, from what I gathered, listening carefully while ostensibly reading a magazine, had already seen Hussein on a previous occasion and had liked what she saw. He looked "responsible", she told her friends, a man, not little boy. Today would be a confirmation of her first impression.

Sumaya was dressed for the occasion in a crisp, off-white, tailored linen two-piece suit, with matching high-heeled shoes and a beige handbag, a colourful scarf only half concealing her hair. A hint of makeup had been carefully applied, just enough to highlight eyes and lips, a particularly successful attempt at suggesting subdued coyness and femininity.

At the next station, a mother and two fat little boys boarded the women's carriage. They too had party clothes on, the two little boys in suits and bow ties, the mother in long robes and a spotless white *heqab*. They, unlike the girls, were returning from a party, as the general disarray in the boys' attire and their chocolate smeared faces suggested. The mother patted one of the boys next to Sumaya while the other galloped across the carriage pretending to be a horse. Sumaya turned her attention to the little boy at once, trying to engage him in conversation. The little boy looked particularly ill at ease. He was sweating profusely and pulling at his belt, which was really too tight for comfort. I reflected silently on the problems that this excess weight would cause him in later life. Suddenly the little boy grunted. He looked bewildered for an instant then was sick, relieving himself of his extensive, ill-digested meal all over Sumaya and her companions. The passengers gasped. The boy started howling and ran to his mother, who proceeded to comfort him. Sumaya and her friends looked at each other, embarrassed. They extracted tissues from their handbags in a hopeless attempt to reduce the damage. At no time however did they look angry. No bitter words were exchanged. No one said anything about the little boy being a fat slab and the mother a carefree educator. The passengers clucked their tongues and mainly expressed concern for the little boy's health. The mother, still holding her son in her arms, suggested that the outfit would greatly benefit from a good washing. She told the attentive girls what brand of washing soap to use. They seemed to approve. Abandoning their useless efforts, they turned their attention towards the little boy. Was he feeling better now? One of the girls volunteered a story describing how she too had been sick after a party. One should not eat outside one's home, was the general conclusion. No further mention was made of the missed party, or the spoilt clothes.

The girls left the carriage at the next station. They were going home to wash and change. I wondered if Sumaya would still make it to the party and if Hussein would be waiting. Was she really as unconcerned with what had happened as she made herself out to be, or was she just pretending? Did she hate the little boy deep down, but was unable to find words to express her anger, having been taught never to show it in public? Or did she maybe consider the little boy an instrument of fate, a sign that her meeting with Hussein was not looked upon favourably in heaven, where matches were made?

The little boy's mother seemed to find Sumaya and her group's behaviour quite natural. In the conversation she struck up a little later with the other passengers, while her fat son was sleeping fitfully, no mention was made of the girls.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Musaka'a

Ingredients:

1/2 kg. Aubergine
1/4 kg. minced meat (cooked)
1 cup fresh tomato juice
2 tbsp. tomato paste
1 1/2 tsp. crushed garlic
3 tbsp. corn oil
One bouillon cube
Pepper + allspice + ground nutmeg (no salt)

Method:

Peel the black aubergine outer skin in strips, then slice them round into thick rings. In a wide baking pan, heat the oil, then place the aubergine slices on top of it, stir frying the slices over high heat, and only for a few seconds when the lower layer colours. Lower the heat and cover the pan allowing the aubergine to release its juices and cook in them. This should take approximately 10-15 minutes. You may need to add just a few spoonfuls of water, depending upon the aubergine. Remove the aubergine from heat. This process is used instead of deep frying it in oil and consequently acquiring a very heavy meal. In another cooking pan, melt the butter and gently fry the garlic, then add the tomato juice and paste, the bouillon cube, the minced meat, the spices and some water. Bring to the boil, then simmer over low heat until it slightly thickens. Pour the tomato sauce over the aubergine and shake the pan, then place it uncovered in a pre-heated medium oven for about 30-40 minutes. Serve with white rice and green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Cakes and coffee

What can ail thee, coffee drinker? Nigel Ryan finds out

A new phenomenon is appearing on the streets of Cairo. Slowly, stealthily, they are creeping into the most unexpected corners of the city. It is the upmarket coffee shop, which invariably sells pastries in addition to coffees the descriptions of which might as well be drawn from a seed catalogue. Blueberry mocha vanilla with extract of raspberry — you know the kind of thing — small bags of which appear on supermarket shelves usually with a gold adhesive seal announcing that they are part of the gourmet coffee collection.

They are springing up everywhere, from the shiny boulevards of Mohandessin to alleys downtown, where several *ahwaz* have filled their floors, painted the tables a primary shade, and installed a cappuccino machine. They are a sign of the times. I do not know whether they portend well, my suspicion being that they are merely the beverage equivalent of the shopping mall.

I had a croissant, a small cheese flan made with *gibna roumi*, a grapefruit juice and cappuccino — a reasonably substantial breakfast that barely cost five pounds. The cappuccino came with a sprinkling of cinnamon. You can find better, though it would be easier to find worse. Unless you specify otherwise, it will be very, very sweet. While Simonds hardly aspires to capture the up-market clientele the new pretenders appear to he after, it is a comfortable place if, of course, you can find a seat.

The Zamalek headquarters are altogether different. Seldom empty, it is often difficult to find a seat. Standing room only is the

norm, yet even this does not deter the customers, who crowd in around the cabinets displaying pastries, huddled in corners or jostle one another at the counters.

A note on etiquette: on entering purchase your ticket from whoever is behind the till. Cakes and pastries appear on a separate ticket to beverages. Hand beverage ticket to whoever is behind the counter, together with a small gratuity. Pastries and pastes are dealt with separately at the appropriate cabinets. Croissants tend to be better the earlier you arrive. Unfortunately they sit in a heated cabinet, slowly drying out, so unless they are less than appetising, by mid-afternoon virtually inedible. And what applies to the croissants applies equally to the pastries.

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Simonds, 112, 26th of July, Zamalek.

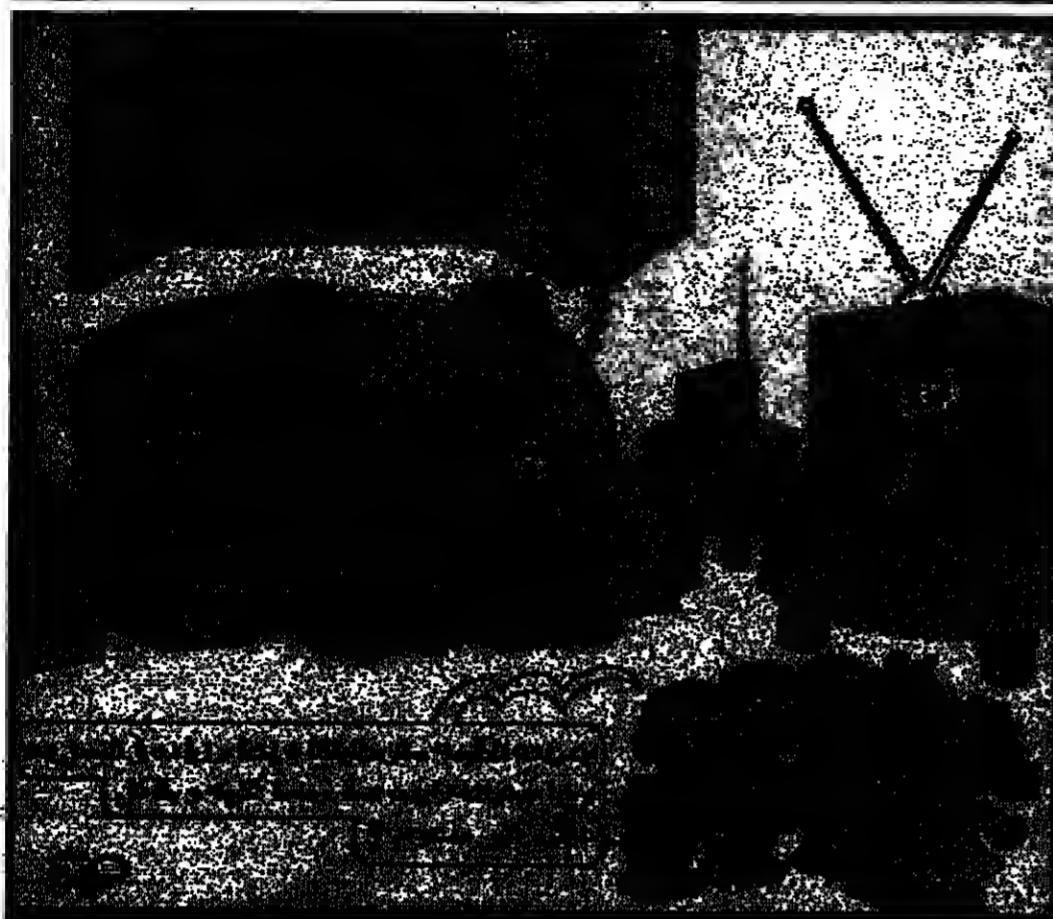
Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. Dun-coloured (4) | 42. Chirps (6) |
| 5. Definite article (3) | 43. Conductors (8) |
| 6. German composer, most famous for his stage work (4) | 44. Personal pronoun (2) |
| 12. String instrument (5) | 45. ... Juan, Argentina (3) |
| 13. Sped (3) | 46. Suffix forming nouns (2) |
| 14. Quotidian (5) | 47. Clangs: containers (4) |
| 16. Loft (5) | 50. Patches (5) |
| 17. Refuse scrap (3) | 52. Resound (4) |
| 18. Baromed (5) | 56. Pet name of President Lincoln (3) |
| 19. Store, abb. (3) | 57. Self-playing percussion instrument (7) |
| 20. Auctioneers' mallets (7) | 59. Room for natural science experiments (3) |
| 21. And so on, abo. (3) | 60. Brass instrument used by army (5) |
| 24. Novice (4) | 62. Mr Ferrer (3) |
| 26. Mitzvah (5) | 63. It replaced the harpsichord (5) |
| 27. Fish of turbid kind (4) | 65. Blotch (5) |
| 28. Reeves, abb. (2) | 66. Pet name of Onassis (3) |
| 30. ... May morning. 2 wds (3) | 67. Chute (5) |
| 31. Weather directions (2) | 68. Rolled down (4) |
| 32. Hayden was called its "father" (8) | 69. Weather directions (3) |
| 34. Female fowl (7) | 70. Stately shade tree, pl. (4) |
| 35. Cavity for earring (7) | |
| 36. Slow dance of French origin (7) | |
| 37. Personal pronoun (3) | |
| 38. Toe, jumbled (3) | |
| 39. Weather directions (3) | |
| 41. Plucked string instrument (8) | |
| 43. Behaviour, etiquette (7) | |
| 45. Admiral (6) | |
| 47. Thrush (4) | |

Who needs words?

For forty years, the mordant humour of Hegazi's caricatures have exposed the irony behind the painful contradictions of everyday reality in the Arab world. This year, Hegazi turns sixty. Fayza Hassan tries to pin down this master of witticism



Response to an official contention that subsidised food was promoting laxity in the Egyptian population



Birth control: TV campaigns have informed an unexpected public: the very young are now able to discuss freely the pros and cons of the various methods of protection available. This little girl is selecting the one which she might want to adopt in the future.



In his compilation of Hegazi's forty years of caricatures, Mohamed Boghdadi writes in the preface of his book *Hegazi: the artist of the Egyptian alley*: "Have you ever tried to review historical events through the pen of a caricaturist? To listen to the voices of the ordinary Egyptian people echoing in the thousands of quips accompanying the caricatures?"

This is what Boghdadi has done, and for five years he went about collecting nearly forty years of caricatures and children's books illustrations, in an attempt to explain Hegazi's art and personality. His task was complicated by the fact that Hegazi never kept any of his works. Once he wrote a short note to Boghdadi — who was asking for his help in locating some of his old caricatures — informing him that his own work embarrassed him. He painstakingly avoided to even glance in passing at what he had already published. Confronted with it by chance while leafing through a publication he blocked it out of his conscious observation. When it was done, he wanted nothing to do with it any more. Therefore, he kept nothing. There were no records, no scrap books.

Boghdadi was left to the task of looking for published caricatures, scanning archives and microfilms in search of the famous signature, with no encouragement from his subject. On the contrary, Hegazi did his best to dissuade him. "This kind of retrospective is usually done to honour dead artists," he said, "so why don't you leave it alone until I am gone and then publish your book if you wish?" But Hegazi, one of the greatest Arab caricaturists, is intriguing to all those who enjoy his work. He is shrouded in mystery; he lives as a semi recluse and little is known of his private life.

Who is the man? How did he come to this form of political and social discourse, why does he abandon it for long spells, why is he back now publishing in *Rose El-Youssef*? "The great silent man" as Ahmed Faud Negm has called him, doesn't say much on the rare occasions when he surfaces, these days, ex-

cept that like his father, the train driver, he is not inclined to verbosity.

Commenting on Hegazi's most popular caricatures, veteran journalist Samir Sobhi says: "If in the '40s and '50s, Abdel-Samie' pictured El-Masri Effendi with his *tarboosh* and *sebha* (worry beads) and if Rakha's favourite character was a *bin el-balad*, coyly copying foreign ways, Hegazi has presented his public with the genuine, typical Egyptian woman, her head covered with the *mandil bi ouya*, (Head kerchief adorned with colourful pompons on the edge) going around the *hara* clad in her *melaya leff* (black wraparound used in the olden days to cover the body from shoulders to ankles), accompanied by the slip-slap of her traditional wooden clogs. "Hegazi," says Sobhi, "has favoured the true *bin el-balad* costly plump and plagued with a thousand problems borne with simplicity and courage." Her fellah counterpart is a fitting match, a true product of the Egyptian countryside, instantly recognisable as such, even when sporting a "St Michael" suit."

One of Hegazi's most famous caricatures features a rather hefty housewife having forsaken the *mandil* but not the clogs, sitting next to her identically dressed husband. He is smoking a cigarette with his after dinner cup of tea watching a belly dancer on television: the image of petty bourgeois gratification. Their five children express the preoccupation of the day brought about by official commentaries on the reckless misuse of subsidised foodstuff: "Honesty the government can't stand us. We represent the population surplus, our father is a redundant worker and our mother has grown fat on subsidised bread" (see cartoon top left)

It is always the daily problems of the poor which arrest Hegazi and if his observation is ironical it is compassionate as well. Those who know him say that he has been strongly influenced by his childhood years, spent in Tanta. His family was poor. During the summer holidays, he used to ride back and forth on his father's steam-powered train

watching the Egyptian countryside and the fellah's toil through the window. At night, he slept with his father in one of the derelict shacks the railways provide for their workers. Supper consisted of a few *ta'miyah* spread on a newspaper.

When Hegazi turned 16, he suddenly quit school and ran away from Tanta with a friend, terrified at the idea that if his parents found out that he was a gifted artist they would insist on enrolling him at the art academy, paying his fees, a family the family could ill-afford. In Cairo he found work as an illustrator, but it is only when he had started working at *Rose El-Youssef* that his talent as a caricaturist bloomed.

Once he had found his medium, Hegazi became famous practically overnight. The late Salah Jahan, the most talented and established caricaturist of the period, Sobhi says, knew well Hegazi's worth. As editor-in-chief of the magazine *Sabah el-Kheir*, the breeding grounds of most Egyptian caricaturists, he allowed Hegazi's pen a free reign.

Often in his life Hegazi goes through a crisis. What causes it is not clear. Friends venture guesses that Hegazi simply ignores. During one of these spells of depression he turned his attention to illustrating children's books with caricatures which became as famous as his previous work. For a while, he completely abandoned his role of social and political critic.

Thoroughly political, Hegazi is first and foremost an artist who has used his pen masterfully to express the woes of the deprived, the dispossessed and the marginalised. He feels kinship, he is on their side, never patronising in his political message. His caricatures are pure agit-prop which attempt to draw the poor out of their squalor, distancing them from their miserable condition by giving them a chance to laugh at it. Being able to laugh at one's problems empowers. Problems become less overbearing, more liable to be controlled when their absurdity is grasped.

Hegazi has contributed regularly to all the Ta-

gammu Party's left wing publications, *Al-Ahali*, as well as the monthly magazine *Al-Yasser*. But his caricatures are also prominent in *Al-Ahram Al-Iqtisadi* as well as in scores of publications in Egypt and the Arab world. His art can address any kind of public but his preoccupation remains central, his art never forgotten.

Artist Gamil Shafik went to school with Hegazi and has remained his long life friend: "We went to the Thanawiya School for boys in Tanta. Hegazi was so much brighter than the others that he seemed to have nothing to learn from what was being taught. He hated the mediocrity of it all. But he was very active in other fields, belonged to our philosophy society and while quite young exhibited fierce nationalism. Hegazi was a loner. He never mingled with the others devoting his time to drawings and etchings accompanied by biting little social messages and portraits of great nationalists such as Arabi, Mustafa Kamel and Saad Zaghloul."

During his second year in secondary school, says Shafik, Hegazi ran away to Cairo with his friend Ishaq Kilada and disappeared. "He began his career at *Rose El-Youssef* in 1954. By 1960 he was famous."

The discourse on Hegazi comprises a number of constants: his brilliance, his nationalism, his biting humour, his infinite compassion for the down-trodden, his intellectual honesty and his left wing politics.

Mohieddin El-Labbad, the famous graphic designer and illustrator of numerous children's books, says that Hegazi uses his sharp intelligence, his culture and his expertise in art, as well as his understanding of politics to deliver highly charged political messages in the form of a student's prank. Aching injustice is constantly present but its sharpness is soothed by the smile. When Hegazi left Tanta, says El-Labbad, he lived in the poorest areas of Cairo, sharing his days with the marginal and the destitutes. He remembers his old friends and has always remained in contact.

"Hegazi's thinking is clear and concise, says El-

Labbad. He discards unnecessary details and reaches for the undorned truth. This is why he is so successful in addressing children." According to El-Labbad, writing and drawing for children achieves many purposes in Hegazi's world: When things are so bad that they stink, only silence is in order. Once he told Tala Salma of the Beirut-based daily *Al-Safit*: "Fi mawafeek bit seer el-ghadab we mawafeek bit seer el-ayn" (There are conditions which stir anger others which only stir disgust). When struck with disgust, children's books and the contemplation of a brighter future give him solace.

Journalist and satirical columnist Salah Eissa sees a large dose of black comedy in Hegazi's art and in his portrayal of the tragic-comic every day life of the poor Arab placed in impossible situations. He stresses though that one should never confuse Hegazi's irony with cynicism. This trait, he says, is completely absent in his character. He feels nothing but compassion for his fellow men. According to Eissa Hegazi's childhood with his father was working on the trains gave him a chance to observe first hand the misery of the poor. He has never been able to forget.

A little more than a month ago, after a long period of silence, Hegazi goes back to providing *Rose El-Youssef* with work. Why the change? No one seems to really know. At present he is incommunicado, and does not even answer his phone, which, according to his friends, means that he is hard at work. The caricatures appearing now every week are the proof. A look at *Rose El-Youssef* will confirm that his *bin el-balad* and her fellah husband are as eager as ever to deliver his pearls of wisdom.



Saving the daily strip

Thomas Gorguisian reports from Florida on the opening of the world's first museum dedicated to the art of the cartoon



Jerry Robinson



The dream child: the Florida museum

One seldom thinks of museums and cartoons in the same breath though for the last two months Boca Raton, Florida, has witnessed the influx of thousands of visitors all intent on one thing — a visit to the newly opened International Museum of Cartoon Art (IMCA). And from among a collection consisting of over 160,000 cartoons, by more than 1,000 artists from 50 countries, visitors will have the

chance to view the output of some of Egypt's leading cartoonists.

The museum is scheduled to be completed in 1997, when it will occupy 52,000 square feet on two floors. But in the meantime 26,000 square feet of galleries, the first phase of the massive \$15 million project, have already opened their doors to an eager public.

The museum is the dream child of Mort Walker, creator of the *Beetle Bailey* and *Hi and Lois* cartoon strips. "People all over the world see cartoons every day... I began collecting cartoons on behalf of the public to ensure that this legacy would be preserved, and the opening of the museum will help us in this endeavour for generations to come."

According to Jerry Robinson, president of the Cartoon-

ists and Writers Syndicate and the person responsible for international acquisitions, the IMCA hopes to begin an ongoing exhibition of international cartoons by the beginning of 1997.

"Such cartoons," says Robinson, "are a tour de force of graphic wit and political satire, through which we can find a new perspective on planet earth... and beyond."

Hidden Fayoum

Since its monuments are no longer there, I took the road beyond the tourist traps and discovered Fayoum's fields, pigeons and water-wheels.

Visiting Fayoum should become a regular habit, if anything, to relieve some big city stress.

The best day trips to Fayoum start early in the morning. But if you're the type to plan an 8am departure and actually end up leaving home sometime after noon, Fayoum is close enough to Cairo for it not to matter. You'll still get a few hours of clear air and picturesque vistas.

There has never been a desert highway as deserted as the one that links Cairo to Fayoum. It's just a short, 60km jaunt. But the sand (and only sand) on either side of that straight-as-an-arrow stretch of tarmac makes you feel as though you're going through the city's escape tunnel, on the verge of seeing the light.

The vision of green begins right as you enter the Governorate of Fayoum, which, in topographical terms, is an oasis plateau surrounded by the desert and a gigantic lake called Karoun. Where the highway no longer divides, there is a sign that tells you to take a right turn for the lake and its famous Aulberge of many a melodramatic honeymoon, both in real life and on the screen. Or you can continue straight on towards Fayoum City. This is where you should make a choice, but the best thing is, no matter which direction you choose, you're in for a good time.

Beni-Saleh pigeon towers

Heading left down a dirt road after the Auberge, following five little boys rolling tires on the ground, my travel companion and I came upon half a dozen pigeon towers built over half a century ago. They are mud-brick, with hundreds of cubby hole openings made of clay pots.

Not many people know why the towers are there, or who built them, but pigeons have been flocking to them as though magnetized.

Above us and all around, the chirping of birds provided accompaniment to a cool, refreshing breeze. The noise is a constant during the day as the pigeons go to sleep at sunset. They live in the towers, virtually independent of all the humans around them. Nobody feeds them, and only a few smaller, "tastier" pigeons are occasionally slaughtered and eaten. In other words, it's oot a a

Just as I began to imagine the towers as a pigeon switchboard, some kind of avian message delivery service perhaps, Quran Abd-el-Ghani Aqd, a local school teacher, provided a clue to the mystery.

"These towers were originally built so that lots of pigeons could be delivered to the village poor every year," he said with a chuckle, adding, "but they aren't any more." The pigeon towers were like fancy charity bird cages for the socially upwardly mobile; every big family had at least one built on their land. These days, not as many are going up; it would cost about LE20,000, according to locals, to build a new one from scratch. In fact, the half-dozen remaining towers experienced some structural damage during the 1992 earthquake and efforts haven't been made to fix them. "It'd cost thousands," said Aqd. "People have more important things to think about."



Fayoum's water-wheels: a perfect metaphor for life?



Feathered friends flock to their home-made claypot and mudbrick abode



Small-time trade on the road to Ibschwa

Two types of water-wheels

"Villages where life has not changed for thousands of years..." The phrase kept running through my mind, but is it really true?

Certain places in Fayoum help answer that question and the process usually opens up dozens of other, more philosophic inquiries. The donkey-driven waterwheel, for instance; that steadfast ancient Egyptian invention that has provided the *fellah* with his water since immemorial.

It's easy to see why the *sagia*, or traditional water-wheel is steadily disappearing from the typical village scene, being replaced by the mechanical *trombah*, or water-pump. Abandoned water-wheel carcasses literally litter the countryside. It takes three hours of donkey-powered spinning to produce enough water to

irrigate one *feddan*. The animals take turns, and only last for about an hour and a half. The water-pump does it in minutes.

The donkeys' eyes are covered so they don't get dizzy. Following the donkey around the wheel for a while, I couldn't help but think it a brilliant metaphor for life — or at least the way some people live their lives: blindly working, going around in circles, not knowing what it is they're producing. Are we all like the donkey, born into a cycle we don't understand?

Or perhaps we are all like the *fellah*, trapped in what economist Galal Amin refers to as "the illusion of progress," forced by economic necessity to give up the simple life that made him happy — and satisfied — and thrust into a world where everything must always be faster, more efficient and more advanced.

Fields of joy

There are few things more comforting than watching a cool breeze gush through golden fields of wheat. Along the way from Fayoum City to Ibschwa, look to your left and right: Fayoum's famous wind-powered water-wheels will help you see the wind.

In other places around the world, the water-wheel is a tourist trap. Here, it's the real thing, hidden between lush shades of yellow and green wooden carousels of splashing water. You stop the car and converse with some of the children heading home from school or are accosted by a young girl who wants to sell her little goat.

At a village called Ezbat Othman Effendi right by the train tracks and the canal, there

are three water-wheels next to each other. Listen carefully, says one of the children, to the sounds the water-wheels (called *tawab*, or coffin) make. It's a steady three-toned metallic moan, like a whole herd of very sad cows. The cows are probably sad because this type of water-wheel works on wind power and does not need their undying assistance.

Als, on to the tourist trap: no trip to Fayoum is complete without a drink at the Water-wheel Cafe. Same sad cows, same gushing water, but the backdrop is a surprisingly crowded, dusty version of Venice, a city crisscrossed by canals. And take note: if you ask someone where the water-wheels are, the cafe, not Ezbat Othman Effendi, is where they'll direct you.

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet: Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 7pm from Tahrir, then Giza, Almansa and the airport. Tickets LE129 until 5pm; LE121 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almansa at 1.30pm. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sharm. Tel. 7724-0403.

Cairo-Alexandria: Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 7pm, 10.30am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almansa, then Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Port Said: Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almansa, then Ramleh Square. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada: Services 8am and 2pm from Tahrir, then Giza and Almansa. Departs Hurghada 9am and 5pm. Tickets LE46 until 5pm; LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada: Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE26 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh: Service 1pm, from Tahrir, then Almansa. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE29 each way.

East Delta Bus Company: Buses travel to north Sinai, south Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalati (near Ramleh Square), Almansa (Taqmid Square) (near Heliopolis). Buses to north Sinai and south Sinai depart from the Suez bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 432-4733.

Cairo-Ismailia: Services every 45 minutes, from 6.30am to 6pm, from Tahrir, then Almansa and Taqmid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE37.50; air-conditioned bus LE35, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish: Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, then Qalati, then Almansa and Taqmid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE22; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh: Services every 45 minutes, from Tahrir to 6.30pm, from Abbassiya, then Almansa. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba: Service 9am, from Abbassiya, then Almansa. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus: Services at Tahrir and Almansa. Tel. 243-1146.

Cairo-Hurghada: Services 8am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE39 one way.

Cairo-Safaga: Services 8am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qasr: Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor: Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Assuan: Service 5pm. Tickets LE58 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramleh Station. Tel. 147 375-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Asswan

"French" deluxe trains with sleepers.

Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.45am and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.45am and 8am, Aswan 8.45am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE125 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE130 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers.

Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE231; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE43; second class LE27.

Cairo-Alexandria

"Torbina" trains.

VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 with a meal.

Standard train: Service 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

"French" trains

Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said

Services 6.30am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check 390-2444; or Hilton 731-5806.

Cairo-Khartoum

Tickets LE388 for Egyptians, LE399 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor

Tickets LE228 for Egyptians, LE765 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada

LE765 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Tickets LE246 for Egyptians, LE383 for foreigners, both round-trip.

| EGYPT AIR | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates: | |
| | |
| Abu Simbel Sales Office: | 32436-324735 |
| Alexandria Office: Ram: | 433357-4329778 |
| Gleem: | 5855461-5065434 |
| Airport Office: | 4218464-4227896-420237-4218189 |
| Aswan Office: | 315400/1/2/3/4 |
| Airport Office: | 40387-404568 |
| Assuit Office: | 323151-322711-324000-324987 |
| Mansura Office: | 363978-363733 |
| Hurghada Office: | 443591/4 |
| Airport Office: | 442883-443597 |
| Ismailia Office: | 328537-221954-221951/2-32836 |
| Luxor Office: | 388538/1/2/3/4 |
| Airport Office: | 390567/7/8 |
| Luxor Office Karnak: | 322360 |
| Marsa Matruh Office: | 934398 |
| Menofia Office (Shebin El Kom): | 233302-233523-233522 |
| New Valley Office: | 685961695 |
| Port Said Office: | 224129-222870-220921 |
| Port Said Office Karnak: | 238833-239070 |
| Sharm El Sheikh Office: | 60314-60409 |
| Airport Office: | 604068 |
| Taba Office: | 6053001-630011 |
| Direct: | 5783620 |
| Tanta Office: | 311750/311760 |
| Zakazik Office: | 349829-349830/1 |

Mediterraneanism rising

European and Mediterranean countries met for the first time in Naples to cooperate on tourism. Rehab Saad took stock of their deliberations on increasing sea-bound tourist traffic

Travellers' book guide

From farmyard to hunting companion

Patrick Houlihan, author of *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*, has produced what should be, but is not, a companion book called *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*. Both books are published by the American University in Cairo Press in the same size and format. Each claims to be the first of its kind in examining aspects of the relationship between people and the creatures around them. But here the similarity ends.

Birds is an informative and well-planned book, described in *Popular Archaeology* as "a major standard work that will be as welcome to Egyptologists as it will be to ornithologists the world over". *The Animal World* is unlikely to become a standard work because, simply, it does not do the animal justice.

Each covers the relationship between the ancient Egyptians and the creatures that were important to their daily lives, work, leisure and religious practices. *Birds* provided a systematic survey of all the bird life depicted in art and hieroglyphic writing, sketched the role of birds in secular and religious spheres, and compared their present-day distribution with that in the times of the

Nubia and Malta — Mediterranean countries that were once linked to Phoenician trade routes; and Egypt wants to facilitate investments for foreigners as well as Egyptians, given recent cabinet resolutions removing obstacles to investments in hotels and tourist villages as well as conference, health and sports tourism.

Egypt also proposed investment projects on its northern coast as well as Sinai, the Red Sea and the Western Desert cases.

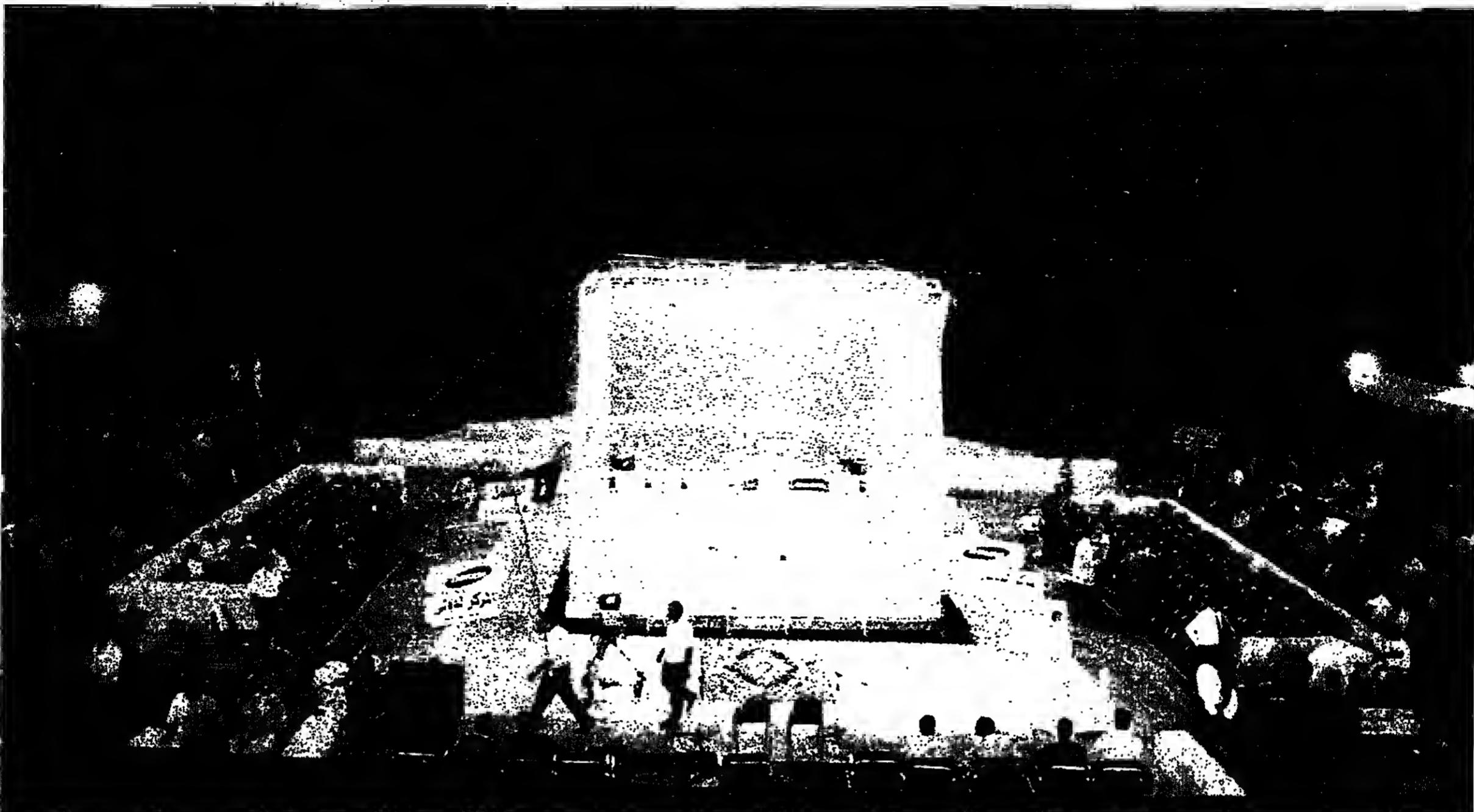
Mamoud El-Beltagi took advantage of his trip to Naples to meet the head of the French delegation. They agreed to plan joint tourist events on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Egyptian-French relations in 1998 and discussed joint cultural events to attract tourists from distant countries like the USA and Japan.

El-Beltagi said that 50 per cent of tourists to Egypt come from European countries: a tourist flow that makes imperative the exchange of information and tourism research. "We should make use of the EU and the other Mediterranean countries' experience to modernise Egypt's information system and develop new tourist trends like health, yachting and environmental tourism," he said.

The following chapters are more promising, but spoiled by some contradictions and a poor choice of source material. The author would have been better advised to abandon secondary sources in favour of on-site viewing of ancient Egyptian representations in tombs.

Problems with the content aside, there are also annoying editing deficiencies throughout the book. Take the use of the upper case: for some reason 'Leopard' and 'Giraffe' are deemed worthy of capital letters, while 'baboon' and 'elephant' remain in their rightful lower case. We have capital letters for 'Osiris plumes' and 'Ostrich eggs', but small letters for 'elephant tusks'. Why? Other editorial failings include the mention of place names like Gabel Barkal in the

Tokyo, Rome, Paris, Bombay — they've all hosted squash championships and each has its own special atmosphere. But will the players ever forget playing in the shadow of the pyramids at the Al-Ahram International Championship? Eman Abdel-Moeti follows the thrills and spills of the competition



The glass court, with the pyramids of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure behind

photos: Salah Ibrahim

Squash in the pyramids' shadow



Ahmed Barada played Jansher Khan in the final

The only remaining wonder of the ancient world is currently playing host to a most modern sporting event — the Al-Ahram International Squash Championship. This competition, played at the Giza pyramids, is one of the Hi-Tech Super Series of the Professional Squash Association (PSA), and is being broadcast by 43 television companies to reach a potential worldwide audience of 100 million. Prize money totals \$100,000.

Many of the 1,000 spectators who showed up last Saturday night came mainly to see the glass court imported from England. Standing on the hill overlooking the Pyramids, it was a breath-taking sight. However, by the end of the championship even those who had come mainly to admire the court and cheer the players had quite a good idea about squash. This was one of Al-Ahram's goals in organising the championship. The other was to provide a high standard of competition to encourage all the promising Egyptian squash players outside the national team, a team which has brought Egypt's name back to the international squash circuit after a 15-year gap.

Al-Ahram Organisation is not a stranger to the world of sports. Previously it has taken part in organising competitions in football, the country's number one sport. Squash, though it has never had the same popular appeal, has produced a string of Egyptian international champions — Abdel-Fattah Amr, in the 1940s, and in the '50s, '60s, and '70s, Gamal Awad, who played the longest match in squash history: two hours and 46 minutes against former world

champion Jansher Khan. Now, in the '90s, Egypt's squash players are once again a force to be reckoned with.

By organising such an international championship, Al-Ahram is, of course, also promoting Egypt. "Squash is a universal language," said Ibrahim Hegazy, editor-in-chief of the weekly *Al-Ahram El-Riad* (Al-Ahram Sport) and deputy head of the organising committee. "If athletes are ill-mannered, they make a bad image of their own people, but if they behave well, they not only give a good image of their countries, but they can also clear up cultural misunderstandings, or replace false images from the media with real ones."

Hegazy had been dreaming of an opportunity like this for a long time — the chance to organise a sporting event that the whole world would talk about. He noted that Egypt was doing well in squash, the national team having taken a surprise third place in the last World Teams Championship. Then he noted that Egypt had something no other country could boast of — the Pyramids. So what could be better than to bring world squash stars like Jansher Khan, Rodney Eyles, Brett Martin, Peter Nicol, Simon Parke, Chris Walker, Ahmed Barada together at the Giza Pyramids, and broadcast the games worldwide?

Hegazy presented his idea to Ibrahim Nafie, chairman of the board of the Al-Ahram Organisation, three months ago. Hegazy suggested \$65,000 as prize money, but an enthusiastic Nafie, who saw the championship as a way for Al-Ahram to put some-

thing back into Egypt, raised the amount to \$100,000. He immediately called on the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Defence, the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, and the Giza Governorate to collaborate on the realisation of the project.

The location chosen for the court and the bleachers was a small squared hill two kilometres from the pyramids. The initial plan was to erect an enormous tent covering the bleachers, which were on three sides of the glass court. Unfortunately, high winds made the idea unworkable. Instead, the construction crew had to erect a roofless tent around the bleachers and the glass court during the period of construction, to act as a wind break. But after the court was erected, its walls started to bend in the strong wind. The English engineers who had come to supervise the erection process, failed to do anything about it. At one o'clock in the morning last Thursday, a crew from the Arab Contractors Company headed by engineer Ismail Osman came to the rescue, holding the walls fast with steel wires.

The design of the LE200,000 site was the responsibility of Italian-Egyptian Mohamed El-Hadi, an expert on open-air sites, including museums and exhibitions. "We carried out careful studies of the area, and made sure not to use any tools or equipment that might put the monuments in danger," he explained. "Everything is erected on the surface, we did not dig or use heavy machinery." El-Hadi has been organising open-air events in Italy and other European countries for nearly 14 years. To generate

electricity for the place, an on-site electrical system was especially designed, and two generators were brought in.

The tournament is now in progress, and the feedback is positive. "It is good that Egypt managed to put its energy and resources into this event. This is a nation that found the courage to take the risk, and succeeded," commented John Nimmick, executive director of the PSA. Nimmick suggested that the championship should be moved to a different archaeological site in Egypt every year, to encourage more and more fans to attend. He also confirmed that the championship would be held every year as one of the PSA Super Series. The PSA board still has to decide after the competition whether it attained all its goals, or if any modifications are necessary.

"When I go home, I will always remember how the court overlooked this historic site," remarked Nimmick. And television presenter Robert Edwards, who will be presenting the tournament in the Super Series' 52-minute programme broadcast daily to the US and UK, said the Giza site was surpassed only by the Bombay tournament site.

As for the players, most agreed that the Giza glass court was the best place they had ever played. Simmo Parke, ranked five in the world and a cancer sufferer who has been receiving chemotherapy since January, said, "The minute I go into the court, I see nothing but the front wall. But as soon as I walk out, I see a wonderful view. I think I want to come back here."

Pros united

Three Egyptians, two Australians and a Pakistani founded a world-wide professional squash association 24 years ago

The Professional Squash Association (PSA) was founded in 1972 to promote the sport and to look after the welfare and interests of its player-members. The idea of a professional association developed when international players grew dissatisfied with having to conform to the regulations of different tournaments, which varied substantially, and in some cases were not fair.

Much of the credit for the association's formation goes to Egypt. It is claimed by some Egyptologists that the game of squash began here. They cite depictions in certain tombs, claiming they represent an ancient form of the game. In the modern era, Egypt has certainly featured prominently in the annals of international squash, both on court and behind the scenes. Egypt's Ahmed Safwat, Abbas Kaoud and Gamil Alam formed the Egyptian team which won third place in the 1971 World Championships. These players decided that the inconsistencies in tournament rules needed to be dealt with, and that universal international standards should be laid down.

Together with Jeff Hunt and Ken Hisco of Australia and Ramat Khan of Pakistan, the three Egyptian players founded the Professional Squash Association. They drew up a constitution providing an elected board, consistent regulations, official world rankings, minimum prize money, and assuring that players would be provided with good accommodation, reliable referees, good media coverage and suitable facilities for play. Since then, all the world's top squash players have joined the PSA.

The PSA now organises more than 32 championships throughout the world, seven of which constitute the Hi-Tech Super Series, where the prize money is over \$50,000 per tournament. The seven tournaments are Al-Ahram, Bombay, British Open, Hong Kong, Qatar, and the US.

According to the PSA, the Al-Ahram International Championship has been allocated 1,000 points, which count towards the players' world rankings. Those points are distributed as follows: the first prize winner acquires 175 points, and \$15,750; the second prize winner gets 115 points and \$10,350; third and fourth placed players gain 70 points and \$6,300. Players placed between fifth and eighth receive 42.5 points and \$3,825, and those between ninth and 16th place get 25 points and \$2,250. From 17th to 32nd place players receive 12.5 points and \$1,125.

From its small beginnings, the organisation has achieved international influence over all matters concerning the professional game. "It is our responsibility to promote squash, find sponsors, and make sure that a tournament's regulations conform with the suitable standards," said John Nimmick, the PSA's executive director.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Egypt keeps the side up

Barada enchanted spectators, Wagih disappointed them, Shabana surprised them, and Faizy proved himself

The Egyptian squash players taking part in the Al-Ahram International Championship are living proof that an unwavering determination to excel will produce results.

Ahmed Barada, always nervous of performing before his Egyptian fans, gave them some of his greatest performances since the last World Teams Championship. Contrary to all expectations, Barada made it to the quarter-finals, beating Rodney Eyles, world ranked number two, with a score of 3-0, and has a good chance of beating Chris Walker, world ranked seven, in the semi-final, and even meeting Jansher in the final. A lucky recipient of the wild card, which allowed him to enter the main draw, Barada, world ranked 35, scored one victory after another. In the first round last Saturday, Barada beat Argentina's Federico Usandiz, ranked 29 in the world, 3-1. In the second round, he swept past Daniel Meddings of England, ranked 20, with a 3-0 victory.

It was not such a happy story for Egyptian champion Amir Wagih. Wagih, ranked 23 in the world, suffered a first round defeat at the hands of England's Stephen Meads, world ranked 14. In his match against Meads, Wagih seemed heavy and was slow to reach the ball. After losing many points and

strokes, he became argumentative with referee David Stevenson, whose decisions led some people to accuse him of bias, a charge Stevenson was quick to deny: "I have to admit that I made some mistakes in that match, but I was not biased," he said. "I don't care if the player is British, Australian or Egyptian." And a disappointed Wagih, trying to recover from the frustrations of the match, refused to lay the blame at the referee's door. "He may have made a couple of mistakes, but I have to admit that coaching the junior national team has affected my physical fitness because I dedicated most of my time to them. I shouldn't have overlooked my own training programme," he said. It was Wagih's second recent defeat in a major championship. He also lost to Ahmed Barada in the All Africa Championship finals. His poor form has prompted him to pledge to stick strictly to his daily training routine in an attempt to regain his former fitness.

Ahmed Faizy, Egypt's junior champion, ranked 38 in the world, was disappointed not to receive the wild card and thus go straight through into the main draw. However, he refused to let his disappointment deter him. Faizy impressed his audience with his determination not to miss any shot, no matter how difficult it was to reach. His advanced technical moves lead him to beat Pakistan's Shamseddin Khan, ranked eight in the world, 3-1 in the first qualification round. He then defeated Scott Hardy, world ranked 145, 3-0 in an easy game. Faizy went on to the first round of the main draw, where he met Pakistan's Zarak Jahan Khan, world ranked 11. Unfortunately Khan's experience and stamina defeated Faizy 3-0.

The surprise of the tournament was Egypt's junior Amir Shabana, brother of Egypt's women's squash champion Salma Shabana. Amir Shabana, aged 16 and ranked 166 in the world, has recently joined the junior national team. After playing squash for eight years at Kuwait's Salenia club, Shabana came home to train with Egypt's star players at the Gezira Club. He was selected to go to the British Open, where he made his international debut as a professional. He was knocked out of the British Open first round after Lucas Buit, world ranked 42, beat him 3-1.

However, Shabana's revenge was sweet when he defeated Scott 3-1 in the second round of the qualifying draw of the Al-Ahram championship. Shabana had previously beaten Finland's Ville Sistonen 3-1 in the qualifying draw's first round. However, he was

unable to survive in the main draw, and was kicked out 3-0 in the first round by Jason Nicol of England, world ranked 26. Experts at the championship agreed that Shabana has natural talent and a great deal of potential. Shabana himself was in little doubt of the course his career should take. Asked about his future plans, he answered only: "To be the world junior champion."

Karim El-Mistikaw, ranked 94 in the world, and the second Egyptian to receive the wild card, did his best to give a memorable performance, but he could not stand up to Simmo Parke, world ranked five, and was defeated 3-0 in the first round. El-Mistikaw, aged 18, was a member of the junior team which won the World Junior Championship in 1994. He intends to lead his team to another victory at the forthcoming World Junior Championships to be held in Cairo in July.

Four other Egyptian players took part in the main championships, but failed to make it to the main draw. However, it was not time wasted for the players. Instead the tournament provided them with the opportunity to compete with the world's finest squash players, some of whom will remain after the tournament to train with the Egyptians.

Wars of the roses



PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak stepped in last week to halt a dispute between the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and the Egyptian Football Federation (EFF), reports Eric Asomugha. The president ordered the demolition of a partly-constructed building at the heart of the dispute between the two federations.

The new building lay on what had previously been open land between the CAF and EFF premises in Zamalek. In January, EFF had begun construction work on the site, which CAF asserted was intended for use as a garden.

Following CAF's pleas to halt construction, which

according to CAF, had fallen on deaf ears, the African confederation asked President Mubarak to step in. CAF had decided to move their headquarters out of Cairo if no action was taken, and had set a deadline of 9 September to decide on a new location.

Mubarak ordered the building to be demolished. It was flattened on Friday morning, less than 24 hours after his decision, and returned to its previous use as a park. CAF president Issa Hayatou expressed his thanks to Mubarak, describing his action as a courageous step. He also praised Egypt's role in promoting football and other sports in Africa and throughout the world.

Wadie Philistin: Memories brought to life

Who is he, this old, new journalist? He has been writing continuously for five decades, yet for many Arab intellectuals, he is a discovery. Once dubbed the ambassador of contemporary Arabic literature, he is now hard at work reminding us of the past



If someone asked me, on the spur of the moment, who were the three writers I most enjoy reading in today's Arabic press, I would immediately say Wadie Philistin, then pause for a while before making up my mind who comes next.

Leaving through the London-based daily *Al-Hayat* every morning, when my eyes happen to fall on his occasional column, "Talk At Random", a smile lights up my face and I tell myself: there is something in the day worth waking up for.

This October, Wadie Philistin will be 73. Despite his 50, and my 40, years as a professional journalist, I first read his work only two years ago. The first of his articles to draw my attention was about the poet Mahmoud Abul-Wafa, who wrote moving children's poetry which I used to sing as a child.

I have to admit that I am a bit of a pessimist when it comes to reading anything by writers previously unknown to me. This is due to a bitter experience with most writing these days: boring, overblown stuff, full of prefabricated lingo, as if made of concrete. Writing that will not be digested until one breaks a tooth or two, if then... This pessimism, however, has taught me to be modest in my expectations with respect to what I read. If I can proceed beyond the first few lines without being bruised, I continue with a feeling of gratitude to the writer.

This explains how excited I was when I first came across the fresh and stylistically elegant writings of Wadie Philistin. It is an excitement the likes of which I had only experienced once: when, while at the Al-Qantara Women's Prison as a political detainee, the death sentence passed on one inmate was revoked by the appeal court, and she became proved innocent. All the prisoners shared the same thrilling sensation of last-minute reprieve.

Wadie Philistin is a profile writer of a calibre which one rarely encounters these days. His elegant, witty pen fathoms the depths of the character he depicts, obliterating the barriers between the subject and the reader, so much so that you become friendly with the individual, feel that you have lived with him or her for years, and feel great affection towards him or her, regardless of ideological differences.

This in itself is no mean feat, but Philistin couples it with a usage of Arabic so elegant it makes those who love the language gasp in wonder. I often find myself stopping to admire his turn of phrase, marvelling at the way he selects a word usually encountered only in the Qur'an, then places it, with a jeweller's skill, in a

different context, leaving one breathless at his daring experimentation and the felicitous result.

Writer and journalist Fawzia Mahran once told me that she files all Philistin's articles, something she never did with any other writer. This kind of appreciation, I found, was common among many of the writers I know, who are now rediscovering this veteran, though in a sense new, writer. Despite the fact that he never stopped writing since the 1940s, *Al-Hayat* only recently offered him a window through which many of us may see his writings for the first time.

Naturally, when I began reading him in *Al-Hayat* two years ago, I wanted to know more about him, to know the writer himself. Thus when in one of his articles Philistin mentioned the name of veteran journalist Mohammed Ouda, a friend of mine, I immediately rang Ouda. Who is Philistin, I asked, and is he a Syrian-Palestinian as many believe?

He is an Egyptian Copt living in Helwan, answered Ouda, who gave me his phone number. When I first phoned him, expressing admiration in my usual excited tones, he was astonished. His modesty in speaking about his achievements may be a facade behind which he hides his noble sadness at the fact that nobody remembers anything these days. He may well be justified in feeling that "Prophets are least acknowledged in their homeland." But we should tell him: the conditions that prevented you from communicating with us did not do injustice to you alone. We were all unjustly treated, deprived from reading a writer of your stature for so many years.

Although he persists in claiming that he is a retired journalist and belongs to the antiquated past, he is still active, as intensively as his age permits, in pursuing a career which began fifty-four years ago upon his graduation, in 1942, from the American University in Cairo, with a BA in Journalism — a novelty at the time. When Dr Charles R. Watson, the AUC's first president, asked the 18-year-old graduate what he wished to do in life, he confidently answered: I want to become a social reformer! The dream, though not fulfilled, never came true, he comments.

Philistin's was a middle-class family, deeply rooted in Upper Egypt. His father was from Nagada (near Qena), his mother from Qena proper, and he himself was born in Akhmin, across the Nile from Sohag. Philistin always felt "below par": timid, lacking an aggressive personality, a naive puritan. The death of his father when he was eight and his early tutoring

in uninspiring governmental schools added to his feeling of being at a disadvantage.

It was only during his secondary education at an English school on Roda and his subsequent enrolment at the AUC that he was able to develop his personality, acquire more self-confidence and become more sociable, although it took him many years to overcome timidity and to become socially mature.

Chemistry was his favourite course in secondary school. He chose science during Orientation Year with the hope of qualifying for the Faculty of Pharmacology at the Faculty of Science, but the relatively high tuition fees forced him to look elsewhere. Fascinated by the cap-and-gown procession in AUC's commencement exercise, he decided to study journalism, although at that point he had

no literary aptitude and was pathetically weak in the Arabic language.

It took him years to overcome this paradoxical "unfriendliness" to Arabic, his mother tongue. When, ten years ago, he was somewhat ironically became a member of the Arabic Language Academy in Damascus, then, two years later, a member of the Jordanian Academy, he remembered sitting for supplementary exams in Arabic in all his general examinations.

On the basis of a recommendation by his former teacher, professor Fouad Sarrouf, to Farid Shoukair, then the general manager of *Al-Ahram*, Philistin was appointed, much to his disappointment as circulation inspector in the distribution/circulation department. He eventually became thoroughly acquainted with the intricate business of distributing the daily newspaper, as well as more than 40 other newspapers and magazines in Arabic, English, French and Greek.

He did not like this kind of career, however, and preferred a shift to the editorial section. Paradoxically, rather than crossing from the brown building (administration) to the grey (the editorial section), he was offered another job in the newspaper's advertising department, which he turned down. For almost three years (1942-1945) he tolerated administrative work but, in his leisure time, tried his hand at writing and translation, publishing his works in other magazines.

His first book, an Arabic translation of Strindberg's *The Father*, appeared during this period in a series of monthly books which witnessed the "birth" of Naguib Mahfouz as a writer.

In 1945 Karim Thabet Pasha, editor of the daily *Al-Mugattam*, offered him a job on the editorial staff, Philistin handed in his resignation from *Al-Ahram* and joined the newspaper.

The press in the late 1930s and early '40s and earlier was manned (there were very few women in the profession) by self-made journalists who either held degrees in one of the humanities (law or arts) or established themselves in the profession by the law of perseverance. Some even began as copy readers whose main task was to correct linguistic and grammatical mistakes. With the passage of time, they developed into full-fledged journalists.

His active journalistic career was relatively short, though intense. His duties at *Al-Mugattam* covered practically all branches, with the exception of sports and crime news. He headed the foreign desk, served as diplomatic correspondent, reported Arab news, interviewed local and foreign personalities, commented on economic subjects, reviewed books and wrote literary articles.

At the request of Dr Fares Nimir Pasha (1856-1951), the only surviving founder of the publishing house, he succeeded the former editor and editorial writer, Khalil Thabet Pasha, in writing daily commentaries on local and foreign news which were widely quoted or reproduced in the foreign press. He was later named member of the administrative and editorial board of his founder, Dr Amr Boctor. In 1949, he won the Farouk I Award for best editorial writer under the age of 30. The award was endowed by Edgar Galland Pasha, publisher of *Le Journal d'Egypte*.

Before moving to Tunisia, the Arab League's Organisation for Education, Science and Culture (ALESCO) established a committee for coordinating translation activities in Arab countries chaired by Dr Nasiruddin Al-Assad, then assistant director. Members included such eminent intellectuals as Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, Magdi Wahba, Mahmoud Fahmi Hegazi and Bedreddin Abu Ghazi. Philistin was elected to the committee and assigned to prepare a working paper as well as research on translation for a special conference subsequently held in Kuwait.

His "intellectual" hobby is to hunt down scientific terms which have been overlooked by specialised dictionaries. Practically his entire collection of specialised dictionaries (about 200 of them) bears evidence to his annotations, either additions of new words or suggestions of more lucid definitions. Over the years he has managed to compile several thousand abbreviations in different fields of knowledge for his own use in translation.

Another hobby which consumes a considerable part of his time is correspondence with literary figures in the Arab world and with Arab Americans, whom he helps out whenever he is requested to. This has prompted Iraqi writer Wahiduddin Babaeddin to call him the "ambassador of contemporary Arabic literature". Although he has no official claim to this or any other title, he does not deny that he has frequently played a helpful role in literary interchanges between Arab writers. On many occasions, he is called upon to act as a catalyst between men of letters in the Arab world, introducing them to each other and establishing an "etante cordiale" between them.

Currently he is writing a series of articles in *Al-Hayat*, on the intellectual figures he has known throughout his career, in which he endeavours to revive their image in the eyes of the new generation. He emphasised the personal touch and the human aspect in making these articles characteristically colourful.

Most of the characters Wadie Philistin writes about are Arab writers and intellectuals whom he had known in his early youth in the 1940s, names about which Arab intellectuals of my generation know very little — that is, if they know them at all. His writing is a reservoir of memories brought to life for the benefit of new generations who may otherwise grow up oblivious of an important page of their history.

Profile by Safyaz Kazem

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

Every now and then I attend a seminar and come out feeling not only hopeful, but actually rather excited, about the future. Al-Ahram's Regional Press Institute's recent seminar on Media and the Euro-Mediterranean initiative was one such seminar. As I took my seat amongst ambassadors, press attachés, university professors, researchers and Egyptian, European and Arab journalists, I waved hello to my good friend, institute coordinator and board member Alaa Ezz before he gave his welcome address. Speeches by Italy's ambassador to Egypt and representative of the EU presidency, Francesco Aloisi; Al-Ahram's managing editor, head of Al-Ahram International and secretary-general of the Union of Arab Journalists' Salaheddin Hafez, and Michael McGeever, ambassador and head of the EC delegation to Egypt, left me convinced that it was crucial that the MED programmes, including MED Media, which aimed at developing Mediterranean media and increasing the flow of information between the northern and southern shores of the Med-

iterranean, be reactivated as soon as possible. I was so taken with the issue, in fact, that I approached McGeever after the seminar to chat, and that was how he came to tell me that he himself was an avid fan of the *Weekly*, which he read for "pleasure and enlightenment". But of course.

Our dynamic former member of parliament and member of Jordan's Arab Thought Forum, Mona Makram Ebeid, has just come back from Amman, where she took part in the forum's annual meeting. In her usual enthusiastic manner, Mona told me over lunch that the most interesting part was a dis-

cussion, which took place after the meeting, by various Arab experts in the private sector and the future of Arab economic cooperation. She also told me that just recently she had received an invitation from the International Peace Academy in collaboration with the Organisation of African Unity to participate in an exciting consultation in Cape Town, South Africa, in June under the theme of Civil Society and Conflict Management in Africa. Aiming to create greater support for the new OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, the event is quite rightly worthy of the presence of that great man himself, President Nelson Mandela.

Much as it saddened me to hear of Tarek Heggy's resignation as chairman of Shell Companies in Egypt, the news did not surprise me in the least. Having been a good friend of Tarek's for almost as long as the 17 years he has been working at Shell, I knew that it was only a matter of time before he decided to soar to greater heights, and, as of 1 July, he will be flying high as his newly established Tana Group for Petroleum and Chemicals takes off. Tarek's public and literary interests have not, thank God, been affected by this change, and to prove it, both he and his lovely wife will host an exhibition of Nevine Adly Guindy's wonderful oil paintings in the

Marriott's Verdi ballroom on 30 and 31 May.

Once more the Cairo Sheraton outdid itself by organising a splendid cultural event with no aim other than to provide a good time for all. This most recent affair saw me wide-eyed as I indulged in a spectacular performance of famous opera pieces and Broadway songs by seven talented ambassadors. Not your regular, run-of-the-mill ambassadors, though, these were the Ambassadors of Opera and Concert, and included singers from the New York Metropolitan Opera. As wine glasses and windows burst in symphonic harmony, regular, run-of-the-mill

ambassadors, businessmen, artists and other prominent figures in Egyptian society were treated to a magical operatic performance, from which my eardrums are still ringing.

Isn't it nice to know that our very own Ragil Halim, having been awarded the Chevening Scholarship by the British government to study in England for one year, could have chosen to study any subject, and that he chose environmental journalism? One of 40 Egyptians recently awarded the scholarship, Ragil will be off on his merry way to England this coming September, and will return make Egypt environmentally friendlier than ever.

Every now and then I receive an invitation to a cocktail party that I, quite honestly, would rather not attend. The reason being, of course, that it is held to mark the departure of good friends. And so it was last Sunday that, with a heavy heart, I bid farewell to the first secretary of the Italian Embassy, Luca Franchetti Pardo and his adorable wife.



Left to right: Calling for a MED jump-start: Alaa Ezz, Michael McGeever, Salaheddin Hafez and Francesco Aloisi; A man with a mission: Tarek Heggy; On a musical note: The Ambassadors of Opera; Dynamic jetsetter: Mona Makram Ebeid



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